



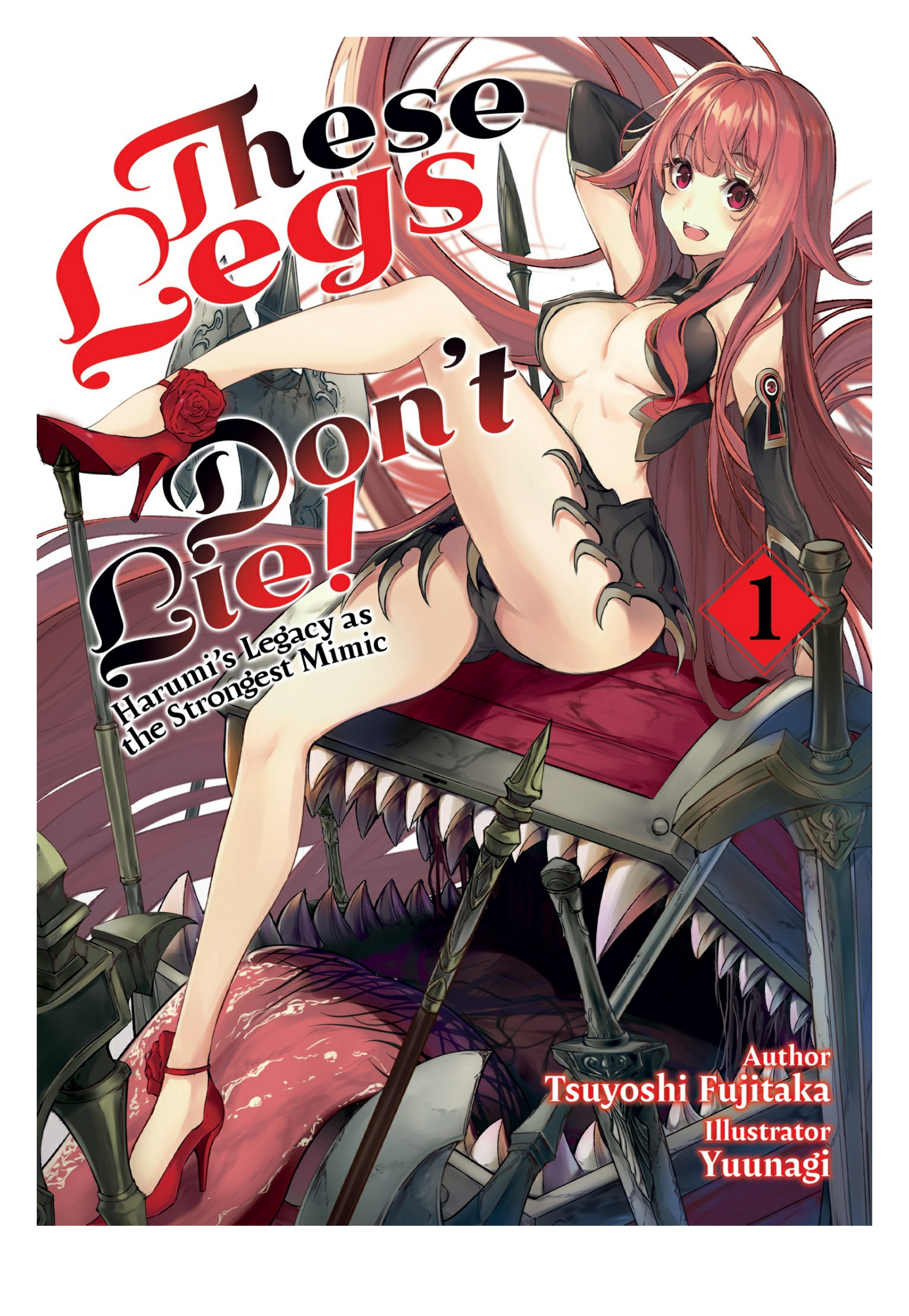
These Legs Don't Lie!

Harumi's Legacy as
the Strongest Mimic

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Tsuyoshi Fujitaka
Illustrator
Yuunagi





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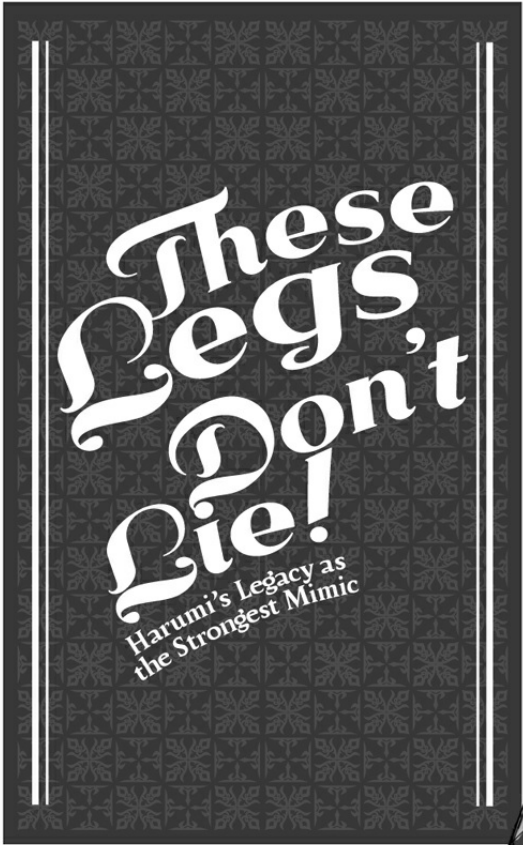


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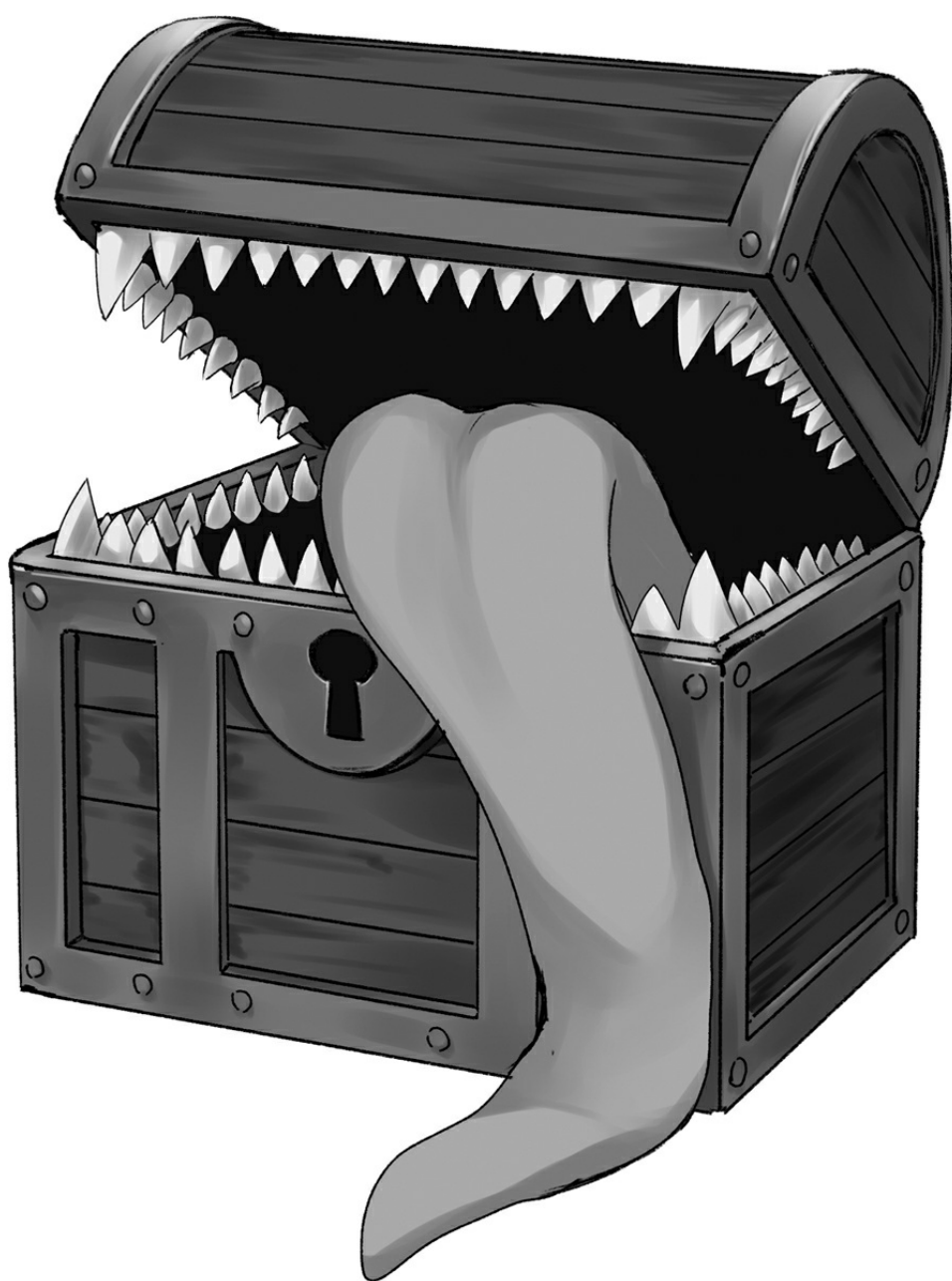
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Part 1 *The Aldora Labyrinth*



Chapter 1: Briefing

This is a dream, isn't it? Yeah, this has gotta be a dream. This was the first thing that I, completely clueless, decided.

After all, I was currently surrounded by all kinds of monsters—humanoid pigs and dogs, skeletons, and more.

Well, if I am dreaming, this would have to be a nightmare, wouldn't it?

At the moment, the monsters didn't seem to have much interest in me. Actually, it was more like they didn't care, since I'd locked eyes with several of them already.

Okay, let's just assume this is a dream. Staying here will be bad news for me, regardless of whether or not they see me as food. I have no idea when they'll change their minds.

So I tried to slowly and nonchalantly leave, only to immediately realize I couldn't move.

Yep. Surprisingly, I was immobile. Completely, totally, and utterly immobile. Couldn't even twitch.

Is this some sort of paralysis? I thought, but the answer turned out to be much more simple—I just didn't have any limbs.

Yep. Wait, what the hell kind of conclusion is that?

But it was the truth. The form I found myself in? A box. A slightly large treasure chest, to be precise—kind of like what you'd see a pirate plunder.

And how, exactly, had I figured that out? Well, I could see myself. Apparently my point of view was situated outside of my own body, and I could move my field of vision in any direction I pleased.

I could also somehow hear sounds and sense smells, despite a lack of ears or nose. I was a chest, after all.

Hm... I don't remember ever being in such a ridiculous body, though, I

thought. That musing immediately led to the follow-up question—what sort of body *did* I remember having?

Unfortunately, I couldn't recall my previous form. Yep, I had no memory of anything leading up to my presence here.

Once again, I looked around the area. Sure enough, I could move my vision anywhere around my main body.

It seemed like I was in some sort of plain room, which was unfurnished and made out of unadorned stone. It had one door leading out of it, and it was filled with monsters.

When I looked closer, I found several other chests just like me. The others were opening and closing their lids like mouths. Their insides were lined with sharp fangs.

I see. Apparently all the chests here were monsters, which meant that I was also most likely one of them.

I tried opening my mouth.

Paclack!

It opened. Just like the other chests, I had sharp teeth, and the inside of the chest itself was very dark, though I could see a large tongue.

Slurp, slurp!

The tongue moved as commanded.

But what the heck am I supposed to do with just being able to open and close my lid and flick around my tongue?! I can't go anywhere like this! Wait, my tongue! Am I supposed to use that to try and move? Hmmm...

I wanted to believe this was all just a dream, but everything felt so real. I couldn't sense any sign of waking up either. Well, even if this *was* reality, I had to wonder what I was here for. I couldn't even move, after all.

"Hello, all you freshly born babies! This is the tenth floor of the Aldora Labyrinth, and I'm its boss! You can call me Marinnie!"

When I looked towards the source of the voice, I saw an arachne above us.

She spoke while looking down at us.

Huh? “Freshly born”? What? No, no. No way. That’s not possible! Sure, I don’t have any memories about my past, but I know so much! Plus, I’m able to think logically. Wouldn’t that be impossible for newborns? I know all these words to describe things! Like, take that woman, Marinnie—she’s got a spider’s body and a naked woman’s upper half growing out of the spider’s head. That sentence alone has a ton of words I can already properly identify and use, like spider, human, woman, naked, and so on!

“I’m sure all of you are like, ‘I have no idea what’s going on, I’m just a babyyy!’ but pretty much all of you are gonna end up dead anyway, so I’m just gonna skip the details. For now, I’m just gonna have you guys sit on the first underground floor. Do your *level* best to survive for a season—five days—okay? If you do, I’ll do the whole explanation thing!”

She’s got absolutely no intention of explaining shit.

It seemed like that really *was* all Marinnie was going to say, because she immediately left the room.

Then, as if to take her place, an old man entered, dragging along a trailer cart. He was huge, bald, and ripped. Though he was shaped like a human, his skin seemed to be made of rocks. Maybe he was something like a rock human?

The rock-man approached me.

Wh-What? What’re you gonna do?

As I panicked, he grabbed me forcefully and dropped me into the cart. Apparently he was here to move us somewhere else.

The old man proceeded to swiftly toss other monsters into his trailer as well. I was going to share this trip with five dog-people, who were essentially more like regular dogs, except they could stand up on two legs and hold weapons.

At any rate, the dog-people filled up the rest of the space in the trailer, so the old man carried us out of the room.

It was nighttime outside, and the moonlight illuminated the landscape.

Unfortunately, just as I’d expected, I didn’t remember this place at all.

Clacka-clacka, rattle-rattle!

We proceeded across unpaved earth. When I looked back at where we came from, I saw several stone buildings identical to the one we left from.

Was that...a town...?

We headed into a dense forest that contained a large stone tower.

We entered said tower. There, the old man walked us into a tiny room before doing something with a small panel on the wall, which caused the room to move with an audible sound.

Oh, an elevator? I thought as I looked around the room.

I soon found something that seemed to be displaying the floor number. B16, B15, B14, it counted down steadily. It seemed we were heading up towards ground level. I almost thought we would reach it, but the elevator stopped at B1.

We left the elevator and entered a stone passage. The old man once again plodded forwards with us in tow. Eventually, he opened a door and towed us inside.

The old man dropped us off in the room and left.

The room was also made of stone, and it was around five meters large in all dimensions. The ceiling also glowed faintly.

I was shut inside along with five dog-people. *Uhhh, so what am I supposed to be doing here?*

“Heya, it’s Marinnie! I’ll be doing this announcement in Lord Aldora’s stead: Season 389 starts *nooowww*! Let’s all work hard to murder all those adventurers!”

As I was deep in thought, I suddenly heard a voice.

Adventurers? Murder?

“Bow wow!”

The doggos seem excited. Do they even understand what the message meant? Hm. This is a problem.

At the moment, I understood that something was afoot and that I needed to act, but I didn't know *what* to do.

"Hey, do any of you know anything?" I tried asking the dogs. Actually, I'd only *just* noticed that I could even speak.

"Bow wow!"

The dogs came closer, but it didn't look like we could communicate. It seemed like they could talk to each other by barking, but I couldn't make heads or tails of what they were saying.

"Someone, please explain this to me! I'm so confused!"

Suddenly, I remembered that the canine monsters were named wardogs. Well, it might be weird to say that I *remembered* it, but I really did just suddenly understand that fact.

Then maybe I can suddenly recall other stuff too?

I looked around the room and recalled that this was actually a burial chamber—rooms that had both rewards and monsters in them.

Hm? If the wardogs are the monsters here, does that mean I'm the reward?!

After I'd taken a while to process this information, my sudden realization caused me to question my own existence. That was when a screen popped up in front of my eyes.

Name: Harumi

Race: Mimic

Gender: Female

Level: 1

Gift: The Beautiful Die Young

Divine Protection: None

Skills: Mimic (Treasure Chest, ?), Languages (Inorganics +2, Human), Storage

Equipped Items: None

Apparently it was my personal information.

It seemed that my name was Harumi. It didn't ring a bell, but it would be inconvenient if I didn't have a name, so I let it slide.

Also, it seemed that mimics were treasure chest—shaped monsters.

But if that's the case, then what's the reward? I look like a treasure chest, but I'm a monster, right?

That was when I realized I had the Storage skill.

Isn't that to simulate my insides, since I'm a treasure chest?

"So do I use a skill by just thinking about wanting to use it?"

Storage: 10G

Something came up. It definitely seemed like I had loot inside of me.

Hm, I think I get it. Let's organize what I know—I'm in a burial chamber located in an underground labyrinth, and I've been placed here as a reward. Adventurers will come here, kill the monsters, and raid the treasure chests. That said, I'm expected to survive for five days... What the hell?! That's totally impossible! I can't move! The second some adventurers barge in I'm done for!

That was when the door to the burial chamber opened, and some people that were probably adventurers barged in.

Uhhh... Do your best, wardogs!

Chapter 2: Adventurers

Well then...

All the wardogs had been immediately exterminated, so...what was I to do?

The five wardogs had been mauled as soon as the door had opened. They ended up split apart by a sword in the blink of an eye.

So now I was left with no one to protect me. Was there anything I could do? Nope, it was totally hopeless—I was just a treasure chest, after all.

My best bet would be praying that the adventurers would leave now that they'd satisfied their bloodlust.

But, come on—there's no way they'd do that! I mean, there was a treasure chest *right in front of them*! Of course they'd try to open it! Even I'd do the same!

As I chewed on my options, I realized my best choice would be to *chew on* one of them. Once they got closer and tried to open me, I'd bite them. Still, I didn't actually expect that to result in much of anything.

Why? Well, there were four adventurers here, so even if everything went perfectly according to plan, I'd still only end up chomping into *one*. As soon as I'd defeated the victim, the other three would just murder me.

From the look of them, there was a warrior, a mage, a priest, and a thief. I could at least tell that much, somehow, so I guessed I was born with the knowledge.

"Hey, come on, why are we taking detours on the first floor?! There's no point in killing small fry like wardogs," the female mage said.

For some reason, I could understand human language. Apparently that was what the Languages skill did.

"She's right. Even if they're weaklings, it still takes weapon durability to kill them. That kind of thing can spell the difference between life and death on the

lower floors,” the priest—a young man—complained.

“But we’re the first ones here during the new season! That means we can loot as much as we want!” the male warrior retorted sullenly. With his sword in tow, he was the one who’d instantly eradicated the wardogs.

“Uhh, what are you even hoping for here? We’re a bunch of veterans. Why would we kill monsters and steal loot from the first floor? All this stuff should be given to newbies.”

Huh, so this kinda thing is expected. Yeah, I think manners are important—especially if they’re veterans. So please leave me alone!

“They’re just gonna get replaced immediately, right? Just think of this as testing our luck. If we get something kinda good here, it means we’re lucky!”

“What does ‘good’ even mean on the first floor...?” the priest grumbled and sighed in exasperation.

But, in the end, the allure of treasure chests won them over. They all closed in on me.

Yep! It’s over! My life as a monster’s coming to a quick and sudden end! But I’m at least going to get one bite in!

They thought I was a regular treasure chest, so maybe I’d be able to get one good chomp in...

That was when the thief, a young man who’d been quiet up until now, chimed in.

“Just so you know, that’s a mimic.”

“Whoa, really? On the first floor? We would’ve been in trouble if we’d let our guards down...”

“What should we do? Just blast it with magic?”

The warrior and mage immediately turned wary.

Yep. Now it’s totally impossible to even get a bite in!

“It’s not just weapon durability we have to watch out for—we shouldn’t be wasting our magic either.”

Y-Yeah! That's smart, priest! The way you pushed up your glasses just now was sooo cool! Just leave a small fry like me alone and go away!

"But don't mimics have rare drops? It should be worth defeating."

No way! I've only got 10G in me! I don't know how valuable that is, though!

"Their rare drop is a Medal of Greed. It boosts the drop rate of items. It'd be worth a small fortune if we sold it."

The second they heard that, the look in everyone's eyes changed.

THIIIEEEFFFF!!! Shut it! Stop spouting things that're better left unsaid! I don't have that in me!

"Well, if using our weapons and magic would be a waste, why don't we try kicking it?"

"That's a good idea. It's the first floor, so one kick should do it."

Come on, priest—you gotta stop them!

But it was too late; things seemed to have been decided.

The warrior—a huge, muscular middle-aged man with legs as thick as tree trunks—approached me.

Even though I was a treasure chest, I was still made out of wood. If someone like that big old guy kicked me, I'd be done for!

I need something to get me outta this! There's gotta be some way out! Right, conversation! If we can communicate, then at least I can beg for my life!

"Help me!"

The warrior stopped in his tracks.

Ooohh? Did it work?!

"Did you guys just hear a sound?" the priest asked, suspicious.

The mage cocked her head as well. "I think it came from the mimic."

"Isn't it just shaking in fear?"

It was a huge failure!

“Help me! Save me! Heeelp!” My lid flapped up and down frantically, but I wasn’t saying anything.

Huh? Does the Languages skill mean I can only understand them?

“It looks like it’s trying to say something.”

Yesss, the priest is so reliable! Great job, glasses!

“Well, of course monsters would be able to talk to each other. Why should we care?”

Dammit, this muscle-brained fighter! At least try a little interspecies communication, you bastard!

Despite my best attempts to speak, the warrior crept ever closer.

Fine, it’s time for my last resort!

“Gaoohh!”

I opened my lid, bared my fangs, and tried to intimidate them.

Khfwhap!

Aaand I immediately lost my balance and tipped over.

Come on, Harumi! Get it together!

This was just awful. I’d never really expected to land an attack, but now I’d even lost the chance to bite them.

“What’s wrong with that thing?”

“Did it just fall over and immobilize itself on its own?”

There’s gotta be something else! There’s gotta be!

In my desperation, I looked over my stats once again. The first thing to catch my eye was my gift—The Beautiful Die Young.

Yeah, that’s super useless.

I’d already tried using my Language skill, but it was meaningless since they couldn’t understand me.

Then...I’ll use my Storage skill! Take this!

I took the 10G out of my storage and, using my tongue, placed it gently out in front of me. *Please take this and let me go!*

Once again, the warrior stopped. “Huh? It dropped something.”

“That’s...10G in copper coins.”

The priest looked over what I’d offered them.

“Could it be begging for its life? Like a bribe to let it go?”

Yes! That’s exactly it!

“10G... That’s only enough to buy some cheap candy! Is it making fun of us?”

That had only made them angry! Actually, what was the meaning of this?! I only had enough inside to buy some cheap candy? I’m a treasure chest! I should have something better than that!

After that desperate tactic, I had nothing left inside.

Dammit, I should’ve just thrown the money at them! Oh, wait—what about putting things inside my storage instead of taking them out? Like, what if I swallowed them whole when they came close?

When I thought of that, some sort of help window popped up.

The following errors have occurred with the Storage skill.

- Permission error: Permission is needed to store living things.
- Size error: The target’s size is larger than the available capacity.

No good, huh? Of course it wouldn’t work. I’d be invincible if it worked that way.

With that, all I had left was my Mimic skill. I was probably currently in the Treasure Chest state, but I still had another mystery state that just had a question mark next to it. I had no idea what it was, but there was the possibility that I could change into something different.

This is my last chance! I've got nothing else!

"Mimic! Mimic, mimicry, disguise! Anything's fine, just lemme mooove!" I screamed desperately.

Suddenly...

Pwoof!

I was blown away.

I had no idea what had happened. By the time I came to my senses, I'd crashed into the wall.

"What the hell?"

"Did...it just moved?"

"So gross! What's wrong with it?!"

That "gross" comment was probably about my appearance, so that meant that my Mimic skill had succeeded in activating.

I gave myself a good look over. Sure enough, I was still a treasure chest...with a few major changes.

I now had a pair of legs sprouting from beneath me and an arm coming out of each side.

Yeah, that really is gross!

Chapter 3: Legs for Days

So now I had a pair of beautiful snow-white human legs coming out from under my treasure-chest body. They started from the base of the thighs. And, just to make matters worse, I also had an arm coming out from my sides. They started from the shoulders.

In other words, my skill had been a success—my freshly sprouted legs had launched me into the wall.

My sudden change seemed to have perplexed the warrior. “Huh? Are mimics supposed to be like this?”

“Monsters vary wildly, both in terms of strength and movement, depending on the level. On top of that, there’s subspecies and many other variations to consider, as well. Still, this is...” the priest said, tilting his head in confusion.

They’re bewildered, now’s my chance! “Heh... HE HA HA HA HA! If I can move, I can do *anything!*”

Using both hands to push myself up, I readied myself and dashed for the closed door. I wasn’t worried—I had hands now, which meant I could just grab the knob and open the door!

Fwump!

But the next thing I knew, I’d fallen face-first—oh, uh, I mean the front side of the treasure chest first—on the ground. I looked behind me and immediately figured out what happened. The mage had tripped me with her staff.

“Is this thing trying to run away? Oh well, it doesn’t matter. It’s so weak that even *I* can deal with it,” she said.

Goddammit! I tried getting up again, praying that there was *something* I could do. Unfortunately, the mage was barring my only means of escape.

Crap!

Odds were that she was physically the weakest of the party, but even then, I

didn't feel like I could win against her.

"Oh, wait—is there some sort of special requirement for the mimic's rare drop? Like destroying specific parts or defeating it with a certain element? That sort of thing's common, right?"

I was facing the mage, but I sensed the warrior approaching me from behind. And, at some point, the priest and thief had flanked my sides. I was surrounded.

"There is," the thief said.

I couldn't believe it. *No way, really?! I have some kinda special requirement? I didn't even know myself!*

"Ohh! Then tell us!"

"Right. Well, it's a pretty troublesome method, but..."

Mm? What could it be? How do I have to be killed to drop an item? I was totally engrossed in the conversation. Likewise, the adventurers were all giving him their undivided attention. *Could this be my chance to run? No, it's impossible. The mage's completely blocking that door. I have to do something about her first.*

The thief walked up to the warrior and got behind him.

Huh? Why's that necessary?

The warrior also seemed to be wondering the same thing, but he didn't do anything. He must've thought it was all part of the troublesome method.

Suddenly...

Pfshhh!

Eek!!! Whaaa?!

The thief slit open the warrior's neck with his knife. Blood gushed out, dyeing everything in the near vicinity crimson. Yep, me included.

What's going on? Why're they having a falling out?

The thief let the warrior drop to the ground, then attacked the priest. He decapitated his former teammate boldly from the front, killing him in a single hit. Then, in one fluid movement, he even managed to leap at the mage. He

made short work of her.

Wh-What?! What the hell is going on?! What kind of method is this supposed to be?!

The thief now approached me, cleaning his knife with a cloth he produced from who-knows-where. I couldn't understand why he seemed to be having fun, but he wore a wan smile as he got closer.

Gah, freaky! What the hell is up with you?! You're scarier than any monster!

Even if I wanted to run at this point, I was paralyzed. My legs had given out from under me.

The thief stopped in front of me and knelt down. He was staring me up and down hungrily, looking like he was about to start licking me all over.

Oh god, I don't stand a chance... This guy's gonna do something weird to me, then kill me. All for some rare drop.

"Wonderful."

Whaaa? The hell did he just say?!

The thief took his cloth and began to wipe my legs, taking painstaking care to clean everything from the ends of my feet to the base of my thighs. He slowly and *thoroughly* made sure to get every nook and cranny.

"The mage had some nice curves as well, but they were *nothing* compared to these."

Rub, rub!

The thief stroked my legs lovingly.

Hey! W-Wait a sec! What do you think you're doing?!

The fear of imminent death left me, but it had been immediately replaced by a completely different chill that ran down my spine. Oh, wait, I meant the back of the treasure chest.

"I just want to bring you home..." the thief said with a sigh.

Eurrgghh! The hell?! Scary!

“But apparently monsters born in dungeons disappear if you try to take them out of it...”

Huh? Really? That’s terrifying too! I didn’t know that, though!

“But there’re also monsters that manage to get *into* dungeons, so maybe something could be done about that. Maybe with a higher level... I’ll need to look into it.”

The thief was lost in thought, but I was already majorly creeped out.

If you’re gonna kill me, just do it already!

“But if I leave you like this, then you’ll definitely die while I’m off doing research. That’d be such a waste.”

Yeah, I agree. Waste or not, I’m pretty sure that I’m screwed the moment I encounter something.

“I’d be fine with protecting you, but monsters can’t raise their level that way. Not to mention there’d be a limit to the amount of adventurers I can just kill off. I *do* have my reputation to think of...”

Yeah, uhh... It’s fine to think things over, but could you maybe stop stroking my legs while you do that?!

I tried to escape, but no matter how much I struggled, it was futile. The thief was a much higher level than me, and he’d stuck to me like glue. In other words, my life was at the mercy of this creep.

“Oh! Why don’t we try this?” he exclaimed with a bright smile. It seemed he’d hit upon an idea.

The thief produced something from a small pouch at his waist—a pair of high heels.

Huh? I’m pretty sure that pouch’s way too small to be holding those heels.

While I was distracted by the mystery in front of me, the thief slipped the shoes onto my feet.



“Great!” The thief nodded, satisfied.

Don’t “great” me! This doesn’t solve anything!

“This is a legendary pair of foot equipment named the ‘Crimson Rose.’”

As the title suggested, they were a beautiful pair of red high heels decorated with roses. For some reason, they fit my feet perfectly.

“Normally a level 1 can’t equip legendary items, but I figured something like this would happen, so I had the level requirement removed ahead of time.”

What do you mean, “something like this”? What did you think would happen?! Wait, actually, hasn’t this guy been talking to me this whole time?

“Well, it’s about time for me to leave. We were originally called to help defeat the boss on the eighth underground floor. I can make excuses for the other three not being there, but it’d be weird if *no one* showed up.”

The thief nonchalantly waved goodbye as he left the room.

Huh? I’m alive?

I couldn’t quite believe it at first, so I just sat there in a daze for a while.

“Ummm... Does that mean I can just leave?”

With eight corpses—five wardogs and three adventurers—the room was practically drowning in blood. I didn’t want to just sit in it forever, obviously, but it could be bad news if I just left without a second thought. I looked over my status one more time.

Name: Harumi

Race: Mimic

Gender: Female

Level: 1

Gift: The Beautiful Die Young

Divine Protection: None

Skills: Mimic (Treasure Chest, Treasure Chest remodeled),

Languages (Inorganics +2, Human), Storage, Explosive Legs
(*Only when equipped with Crimson Rose)

Equipped Items: Feet: Crimson Rose

So Treasure Chest remodeled means this form with limbs?

It seemed to me that the parts in parentheses were what I could mimic into, so I could probably return to being a normal treasure chest. Also, apparently skills could be gained by putting on equipment, since I now had the Explosive Legs skill.

“So I’ve gotten stronger by putting on some high heels...?”

They were a pair of stilettos, to be precise, so it probably *would* hurt if I were to stomp on someone with them. Still, I didn’t have any concrete proof, and nothing would happen if I just sat in this room and worried about things.

Yeah, let’s leave.

With my mind made up, I turned to the door. That was the same time it swung open with a noise.

Did the thief come back? Or is it another group of adventurers?

A demonic-looking statue walked in noisily. It had wings sprouting from its back, so I recognized it as a gargoyle. It was holding a jar.

A beautiful woman followed the gargoyle in. She wore priest’s clothes, but her skin tone was earthen brown.

An undead priest?

Lastly, a young girl entered. She was semi-transparent and seemed to be made of liquid. I guessed that she was a water spirit.

“Umm, hello.”

I tried talking to them, but I got no reply.

What is wrong with you guys?!

Chapter 4: Cleaning

The three of them started working as soon as they entered the room, cleaning up very efficiently.

The gargoyle picked up the corpses and placed them in the jar it was holding. It didn't look all that large, so it must've been more spacious on the inside—similar to the thief's pouch or my Storage ability.

The water spirit produced a torrent of water out of thin air and used it to spray down the blood in the room, washing it away. Meanwhile, the undead priest used a mop to polish the floor.

The room was rendered spotless in no time at all. With their work done, the three left.

They're total pros. It seemed to me like they worked like a well-oiled machine.

"Uhhh... So what do I do now?"

I was placed here, so I'm supposed to stay put and hold down the fort, right? Would leaving count as abandoning my post or something? On the other hand, if I stay put, I'll just get assaulted by more adventurers... I'm pretty sure at this point that they'll just attack the first monster they see, no questions asked. Even if I tried to pretend to be a treasure chest, they'd still come to open me. There's no way an adventurer would just ignore potential loot. So, in the end, I should still leave. After all, I have legs now! I should be able to run away at least.

Fearfully, I pushed the door open and went outside. Despite a niggling worry that I wouldn't even be able to leave the room, it turned out that wasn't the case.

I found myself in a passageway. It was made of stone, just like the room I'd been in before, and the ceiling also glowed faintly.

The passage itself was a simple straight corridor that had doors dotted along its sides. There were also cross-shaped intersections. All in all, it was a pretty deliberately designed place.

Where do I even go?

“Yeeep, I’ve got no clue.”

For now, my overall goal was to survive for five days. That being said, I had no way of actually *counting* the time, and there was absolutely nothing here that’d help me orient myself in that respect...

Welp, that’s a lost cause. Might as well just give up on that. Anyway, my only option is to keep running, but that still doesn’t answer how I’ll do it... Like, I could probably find a place to hide away from any adventurers.

“Hmmm... I guess I should start with learning the floor’s layout, shouldn’t I?”

I’d have an easier time running if I were to know where I was going, and it’d open up options for prime hiding spots. In any case, I couldn’t afford to just space out in front of a room, so I started walking down the passage.

As I traveled along the corridor, I discovered that the dungeon was surprisingly noisy. There was combat happening somewhere, and the sound was traveling over to me. Obviously, I decided to stay away from the source. It seemed to me that I’d be able to differentiate the sounds of an adventurer’s footsteps, so I figured that running before they noticed me wouldn’t be too hard.

“Maybe this whole running away plan has better odds than I thought?”

I was a little bewildered after being suddenly told to survive, but now I was starting to feel like it could all work out.

As I held on to that little spark of hope, I turned a corner and found myself at a dead end. It was a bit disappointing, but now I knew of a spot to avoid when running, so this experience wasn’t totally useless.

Anyway, let’s turn back. Just as I was thinking that, the sound of a door opening came from behind me.

“Ah...”

That was when I finally realized how careless I was being. I couldn’t hear anything going on outside while I was inside the room. In other words, all the rooms were soundproofed. There was no way to tell who might’ve been inside

one.

I turned around and saw an adventurer emerge about ten meters ahead of me.

“Eurgh, what is that gross thing?!”

Yep, should’ve known this would be mission impossible! And there’s nowhere to hide! I’m trapped!

Another adventure came out, then another. One by one, they poured out of the door. In the blink of an eye, over twenty people had gathered.

Huh? Huuuuh?! Hey, what’s the deal with the large crowd? Wouldn’t a normal party only have four people—or like, six at most?!

While there were the usual warriors, mages, and priests, there were also many other adventurers of classes I couldn’t quite discern.

This is way too many! What are you guys, a swarm?!

“The hell is that, a mimic? Are those supposed to appear on the first underground floor?”

“The guidebook *does* say that they rarely appear as traps, even on this floor. But they aren’t listed as a wandering monster...”

A guidebook?! I want that!

“Maybe they just added one this season?”

“If that’s the case, maybe we shouldn’t just carelessly attack it? We’re newbies after all.”

Y-Yeah! Please just go somewhere else and leave me alone!

“You might have a point, but this is only the first floor, right? It’s supposed to be just about impossible for even beginners to die. How’re we supposed to get anywhere if we’re afraid of something like this?”

“Yeah... There’s no way a monster on the first floor would be strong!”

“Okay everyone, quiet down! Please leave the situation assessment to me, your guide. I believe I told you to listen to my orders at the beginning, right? Even if we’re only on the first floor, we’re still in a dungeon! This is a guided

tour! If you're going to act on your own, then I won't be held responsible, got it? I *will* take it to mean you don't need my care. You'll be left to your own devices."

"Okaaay!"

A beginner's tour? Now that you mention it, there're a lot of kids in the group.

The older dude who acted as the guide stepped in front.

I see! He's the only one that seems different, like a grizzled veteran or something. Wait, now's not the time to be impressed!

"Now listen here, be careful whenever you encounter a monster for the first time. You there—what should we do in this situation?"

"Right! We should analyze it and determine how much of a threat it poses!"

"Exactly. First, we should analyze it. All right, those with the skill should try using it."

I'm being looked at! They're staring real hard at me, and they're being super obvious about it!

[Resist analysis...failed!]

[Resist analysis...succeeded!]

[Resist analysis...failed!]

Something popped up in front of me. Three people had tested their Analyze on me, and it seemed two of them succeeded.

"Right! It looks like a level 1 mimic!"

That's all you figured out after staring so much?!

"Okay then. You, what are levels?"

"Yes! They're a number that indicates the overall strength of something."

"Exactly. The thing to watch out for is that levels are just a general indicator, meaning that it doesn't differentiate between races. So, it would treat a level 1

slime and a level 1 dragon the same. Of course, there are no level 1 dragons.”

Um, is it just me, or am I being left by the wayside for a lecture? I guess that means he doesn't think I'm a threat at all. That's fine with me, though! I'm just a level 1, sorry about that! Still, I didn't know about this level stuff either, so it's interesting.

“Now then, while levels are an indicator of power, never forget that they only indicate base strength. They don't take anything that might enhance strength—like equipment or magic—into account. Also, skills are another troublesome factor. If, for example, something were to have an instant death spell, there would always be a chance it could kill us regardless of level. A beginner's Analyze skill does not reveal your target's skills and equipment, so please be careful on that point.”

“Got it.”

“Well, when all's said and done, this mimic is still only level 1. There's no doubt you're all more than capable of fighting it. This brings me to an unwritten rule of dungeon diving: no dungeon will ever go all out on the first floor. This place, the Aldora Labyrinth, is no exception. So, though this one's a little strange, it shouldn't be that much of a threat.”

I wasn't just idly listening to the lecture. I was also actively trying to find a way out of this situation while the guide continued his explanation. Well, the keyword was *try*—it turned out there was nothing I could do. I was cornered at a dead end, trapped like a rat. From where I stood, there was no escape for me from my end.

Since that was the situation, I had to do something about the beginner's tour in front of me. Unfortunately, there were so many of them that the passage was jam-packed. As you'd expect from a bunch of newbies, they all seemed on edge and full of openings...but not in the physical sense.

“Let's see... You guys, the level 10 warriors—come forward. All of you together should be enough to deal with this mimic.”

Talk about overkill! Is that seriously necessary against a level 1?! Come on, you can let your guards down a little more than that!

“Hey, man! I’m a level 9 warrior, but that’s not far off from level 10! I wanna get in on this too!”

“The warriors fought last time too, didn’t they? I think we martial artists should have a turn!”

“I’m a level 15 mage. Couldn’t I just take care of this in one hit from here?”

“Aghh, fine. Then anyone who wants to give it a go raise your hands! There’s a lot of you... Okay, let’s decide with rock paper scissors.”

Now’s my chance—my only one! I can’t retreat, so I can only go forwards. And if I have to advance, it has to be now while they’re all disrupting each other. There’d be no point in just charging at them, but I do have the Crimson Rose. Plus, it comes with the Explosive Legs skill. I’m not quite sure what it does, but it should be some sort of killer move. This’ll be a trial by fire, but it’s my only option!

With that decided, I concentrated all of my strength into my legs and made a mad dash!

BOOM!

For a moment, I couldn’t make heads or tails of what happened. Pain shot through my head, forcing me to grab my lid with my hands.

Huh? Was I attacked? What happened?

The sight of the adventurers was split between me and the ceiling. When I looked up, I saw that the ceiling had cracked.

I see. I must’ve crashed into the ceiling. When I kicked off the floor to try and go into a dash, I must’ve flown upwards instead and hit it. Could the Crimson Rose be raising my leg strength? Well, if that’s true, then...!

I got up and approached the adventurers at a decent speed.

“Explosive...LEGS!”

I thrust forward, launching a kick at the group with full force! If I’d been able to send myself careening into the ceiling with just a fraction of my power, imagine the damage *this* would do—

Kerclank!

The guide's shield intercepted my kick with ease.

Uh, wha...? I'm starting to get the feeling that it wasn't actually all that powerful...

"Looks like it's got increased movement speed somehow. That surprised me a little, but it's still only as strong as a level 1 monster in the end."

Really?! So movement and attack are different?! Huh, isn't that weird? If I have the leg strength to move at amazing speeds, then I should also have the strength to kick really hard too, right?!

The guide raised his sword, and I bolted with all my might.

Fwhooosh!* *BOOM!

Unfortunately, I ended up retreating *too* far. Yep, I crashed into the wall. It seemed that my movement really was the only thing being buffed.

Aghh, so there're no more options! If I were only fighting one enemy, my attack would've created a gap for me to slip through, but... Wait, what about from above?! Yeah, I can just jump over their heads!

With all that decided, I prepared to jump right over them.

Pop!

I froze after seeing what had just happened in front of me.

Whuh?

The guide's upper half had disappeared. Or rather, it had exploded. Yep, it had been a spectacular one too—way more worthy of being called a crimson rose than my shoes.

I'd expected the skill to just be a really powerful kick or something, but apparently the name was literal—it caused the target to explode.

I see, I see... I totally see! Which means... Wouldn't a hit-and-run strategy basically guarantee my victory? I just need to land hits before escaping to safety!

Just as I was starting to be convinced of my victory...

BOOMBAMBOOM!

All of the newbie adventurers on the tour exploded at once.

Uhhh...what just happened?

Chapter 5: Slime

For the moment, all my enemies had been wiped out.

“What was that? I only used Explosive Legs once, didn’t I?”

Not to mention my attempt had been blocked by the guide’s shield. But not only had he exploded, all of the others had too after a time delay.

“Well, I guess it’s fine since I’m safe, but...”

I got closer to the bodies to try and assess the situation.

All the members of the tour had been blown to absolute smithereens—there was nothing left. The door to the room they’d left was also included in the carnage; it’d been blown away.

“Argh, I wanted that guidebook too...”

I’d seriously give an arm and a leg for that thing right about now. Unfortunately, when I’d said there was nothing left, I meant it. Even their equipment had exploded, so there was no way that a guidebook made of paper would’ve survived.

“That made a lot of noise. I should get out of here quickly.”

I was at a dead end, so I’d just get stuck again if anyone else were to come. So I decided to stop my investigation of this...explosive incident and get going.

I stepped over the impact site and said my goodbyes.

Now then, where should I go next?

If I were to return to wandering aimlessly around the corridors, adventurers could just pop out of a room again. Hiding in a room would be tricky too—I’d have nowhere to run.

Hmmm... No, maybe I don’t actually have to keep running? I can’t say for certain just yet, but it’s looking like my Explosive Legs skill is really powerful, after all.

So I opted to peek into a nearby room. I wouldn't be able to calm down if I didn't know when or where a new enemy would pop up. Being in a room would solve that by forcing them to come from a set direction.

Kerchak!

"Hellooo!"

I hesitantly opened the door while extending a greeting, but there was no one inside. Then again, even if there *had* been monsters inside, greeting them would've been useless anyway.

"Yo!"

Or so I thought, but then I heard a voice coming from the ceiling. When I looked up, I saw something green stuck onto it.

"Huh? You can understand me?"

Up until now, nothing I'd ever said had gotten through to whoever I was speaking to, so the response had surprised me.

"I have the Inorganics Language skill, though I take offense to being categorized as inorganic."

"So that means we can talk as long as we both have the same Language skill? But I also have the Human Language skill and nothing I said ever got through to them."

"That would depend on the skill level. Speaking needs higher levels than listening does."

So since my Inorganics Language is +2, I can speak it, but my Human Language has nothing on it so I can't speak it?

"Right... So, what? Your plan is to drop on adventurers when they come into the room?"

"Exactly. Then once I'm on top of them I can dissolve them inside me. Anyway, just get inside—it's dangerous to leave the door open."

Oh, right.

I was still only peeking in. I entered the room fully and closed the door.

“Are you alone?” I asked.

“Well, yeah. Though I’m not sure how much of this is *me*, exactly.”

About half the ceiling was green.

“I haven’t seen you before. Are you a mimic? So that would mean you were placed in a burial chamber, right? I can’t believe you were able to leave.”

Yeah, totally understandable that you aren’t sure if I’m a mimic or not.

“Yeah, I was just born. For some reason, I have these.”

“I’m Slatarou the slime. I’ve been alive for two seasons, so I’m your senior.”

Slimes were a monster that attacked by clinging to ceilings and waited for unsuspecting prey to pass underneath them. They might’ve been categorized as inorganic because they were treated as traps.

“So you’re Slatarou, my senior? I’m Harumi the mimic.”

I gave Slatarou the gist of what had happened to me so far.

“I see, I see... So why’d you come here? Aren’t you just a wandering monster now? Well, I don’t think that means you *can’t* enter burial chambers or other rooms...”

“Ahh... I just wanted a place where I could relax and take stock. You know, plan out what to do from now on.”

“Right, then this is perfect. If you can put those limbs away, then you can pretend to be a treasure chest in the corner.”

Huh? Not sure what’s going on, but if that’s all he wants...

I concentrated on using my Mimic skill. And just like that, I returned to my original Treasure Chest state.

My high heels went straight into my storage as well, so I guessed that they’d automatically equip themselves if I changed again.

“Adventurers like to check the ceiling before entering a room, and if they see me they won’t bother entering at all. That’s why I’ve been able to survive for so long.”

I see. They go as far as to have beginner's guided tours, so it makes sense that solutions to problems like this get passed around. But that's strange, isn't it? Some adventurers might come in anyway if they see a treasure chest. Well, it still beats my other weird form.

"Um, what should I do now?" I asked.

"Hmm, let's see... We're in different situations, so the way we survive is probably different too."

He's right... A vague question like that would only trouble him, wouldn't it? I'll ask something more concrete.

"I was told to survive for five days, but what happens after that?"

"It becomes the off-season. This dungeon is in business for five days, then we get two days off."

"So it's a five-day work week..."

It was a more reasonable business model than I'd expected, although it seemed like we'd still be working around the clock during the season.

"The dungeon gets rebuilt during the off-season. Not only do the adventurers stay away, but it also means we get to take it easy."

"Can you tell what day it is right now?"

"It's only been about eight hours since the season started."

Urk! Only eight hours?! A third of a day?!

"Um, how can you tell time? I don't have a way to tell, so I've been having trouble with that."

"You can just look at the clock... Ahh, you're a newborn, so you don't have one yet."

Hmmm? Clock? But I can't even see anything like that on Slatarou either?

"You can buy it with points. When you buy the Clock plug-in, it displays the time on your stat screen."

"Ohh, I see! But what're points?"

“Points are kind of like our salary. You earn some if you survive the season, and you get a bonus for defeating adventurers. We only get paid after the season ends, though.”

“That’s some good info. I see, so I can buy things...”

I’m kinda getting excited. I still don’t really have a clue about anything, but now I’ve got something to look forward to. I feel like I can get into this!

“Yeah, shopping is one of the few things we get to look forward to. Is there anything else you want to ask?”

“Mmm, yeah... I got this skill called ‘Explosive Legs.’ Do you know anything about that?”

“Nope. Did you get it from the equipment that human gave you?”

“Yeah. Oh, also, does my attack not go up even if I equip it?”

“That’s foot equipment, right? It’s categorized as armor, so that’s why it doesn’t. Armor only improves defense in general, although I believe footwear also adjusts movement speed.”

I see. So my kicking power, or my attack power, wouldn’t get buffed. I still don’t know all the details on Explosive Legs either, so it’s kind of concerning... I wonder how much defense I got from the shoes?

“If you want to look at an item’s details, you need to get a plug-in for that. You could also get it looked at by an appraiser, but you’ll need points either way.”

Points, huh? So it’d be better to defeat more adventurers, wouldn’t it?

“Well, I don’t know what’s up with your skill, but having limbs is an advantage. You can equip armor and hold weapons, after all. I don’t have any parts to do stuff like that with.”

Yeah...I can’t even tell where your head is.

“Um, could I hide here?”

“I don’t really mind... But this place isn’t exactly safe either, you know? I’ve just been lucky so far—all the adventurers that’ve come in here have left

because it's too much work to attack a monster on the ceiling. I move very slowly, and if I get hit by fire magic, I'm toast."

Not to mention pretending to be a treasure chest here would only raise the chance of adventurers actually coming in. It wouldn't feel right to cause trouble for my senior here... Also, well, I was finally able to go outside. I'm not sure how much longer I'll be able to survive, so I kind of feel like it'd be a waste to stay cooped up in a room. Anyway, I came in here to calm down and think about my plans, so let's just do that while I've still got the chance.

"Hmmm... First, I'd need to get a grasp on the floor's layout..."

"Yeah, that sounds like it would be pretty necessary for a wandering monster."

"By the way, have you ever been outside?"

"Nope, so I don't know much. I get here and back by dungeon keeper taxi."

Apparently that old man who'd brought me to this floor was called the dungeon keeper. It seemed he would be back to retrieve me when the season was over too.

"I'd also need fighting practice. I don't really know much about Explosive Legs, after all."

"Hrrmm, I wouldn't really recommend that. It's not like there's a quota for us on the first floor. If you just want to live, then it'd be better to just run, I think. On a fundamental level, we monsters can't win against adventurers who get to prepare for us. The only ones who survive are either really lucky or those who've got such a strong combat sense that the difference in levels doesn't matter."

Mm... Well, I can't really picture having that "combat sense" or whatever, but I did get these shoes. Why not make the best of what I've got?

"All right then, I'm gonna explore a bit outside."

I grew my arms and legs and stood up. Unlike the first time, I transformed rather smoothly.

"Sure thing. Make sure you come back—I'll be happy to let you know the time

whenever.”

“Okay! Thank you very much!”

I left the room and looked around. Luckily, it didn’t seem like there were any adventurers nearby, so I quickly started practicing moving.

I couldn’t quite handle my newfound mobility before, but if I were to master it, then it’d definitely come in handy.

All right, time to start sprinting!

KerSLAM!

“Owww...”

H-Huh? I hit the ceiling again, but I’m positive I held back that time...

“Wait, maybe...?”

I checked my status screen.

Name: Harumi

Race: Mimic

Gender: Female

Level: 10

Gift: The Beautiful Die Young

Divine Protection: None

Skills: Mimic (Treasure Chest, Treasure Chest remodeled),
Languages (Inorganics +2, Human), Storage, Explosive Legs
(*Only when equipped with Crimson Rose)

Equipped Items: Feet: Crimson Rose

Oohh, I leveled up!

Chapter 6: Exploration

I was now level 10.

I see, so I gained a bunch of levels thanks to killing all those tour members. But I killed over twenty of those guys, and they were all supposed to be at least level 10 or something. Is this how it's supposed to work? Hrm, I'm not sure what the standards are. I kinda feel like it should've raised more, but I dunno if that's normal or not. Oh well, I guess that's just how it is. My level didn't go up at all when the thief killed his friends earlier, but that was probably because I wasn't the one who killed them. I probably should've asked Slatarou about this when I had the chance, but it'll feel weird going back now. I guess it can wait till later.

"Mmm...what's weird is that I'm not as hurt as I *should* be."

I looked up at the ceiling. As I expected, it was cracked. The ceiling was made of stone, whereas I was made of wood. I'd crashed into the ceiling with enough force to crack it, but I was just a little sore. That begged the question: what was up with that?

Is it actually because my defense has gone way up? Am I, like, super tough now?

"Let's test it out."

BOOM!

I did a light jump straight up. I'd been fully ready this time, so it didn't hurt all that much. I continued to jump, leaping up a little harder each time until I was shooting up at full power. Fortunately, it still didn't hurt much.

So I moved on to practicing horizontal movement. I didn't have to worry about breaking, so I could go ahead and crash to my heart's content.

BOOM!* *KAKOW!* *KRAKOOM!

At first my body would end up leaving the ground, but as I got used to things, I started to be able to run pretty fast. It seemed that the trick was to lean

forwards and lower my center of gravity.

Also, I didn't need to gun it all the time. As long as I could run at a decent enough speed, I figured things would be fine. I could just adjust myself to be slow, decently fast, or full throttle depending on the situation. It was all about tempo—yep, tempo was the most important part!

Anyway, now that I'd grasped how to move, it was time to restart my exploration of the first underground floor.

It was hard to see my surroundings—not to mention tiring—while I ran, so I decided to start off slow.

Clack, clack...

I didn't know if the entire dungeon was the same, but this area was pretty heavily normalized. The burial chamber I'd started in was around five meters squared in size; that seemed to be the smallest block size for this dungeon.

I could see the lines corresponding to the edges of blocks in the corridors—that's how I could tell. It seemed to me that it would be easy to use blocks as a system of measurement. Talk about convenient!

“Actually, there seems to be something on each block.”

When I looked closer at the floor, I saw a small metal plate embedded into each block. The one I was currently looking at had the letters E9N12 carved into it. When I moved one block over, the next one said E9N13.

I see, they look like coordinates. Taking this at face value, I believe this'd mean that I just moved north 1 block.

“Does that mean the starting block is E0N0? I guess I should look for that for now.”

Clack, click, clack...

The layout wasn't that complicated, so I reached E0N0 pretty easily just by following the plates south. As I got closer, I started to hear loud noises—as if there was some sort of commotion going on. It only got louder the farther I moved.

I started to feel like it was dangerous, so I peeked carefully around the next

corner. My ability to change my point of view was extremely useful in times like this. I could only shift my view up to around thirty centimeters away from my body, but otherwise I was free within that space. That meant I was able to look around the corner without exposing my body.

Swarm, swarm. Gather, gather.

I was looking at a square room that seemed around 4 × 4 blocks large, and there was a veritable mountain of adventurers in it.

There was also a set of stairs leading up, so this was probably the dungeon's entrance.

I'm guessing they do their preparations here before challenging the dungeon proper? Wait, are those stalls? This is more like a festival!

"Hmm, but were there really *this* many adventurers on the first floor?"

If there were, the dungeon definitely would've been a lot more congested. I hadn't even encountered another adventurer since I'd left Slatarou's room, though.

Apparently almost all the adventurers had gone to the eastern side of the dungeon, since they were mostly returning from that direction. By the way, I was peeking in from the north.

It was just a hunch I had, but the eastern side might've been for the more experienced. It seemed like all the people going that way wore more extravagant equipment. They looked like veterans.

"What was that skill again? Analysis? If I could use that, I'd be able to pick out the weakest ones..."

Well, I was told that monsters would disappear when they left the dungeon anyway, so there was no real need for me to try. Instead, I quietly turned around and left.

Let's just say that the southwest is off-limits for now and go in the opposite direction. I suppose I could just go as far north as I can... That might allow me to get a sense of how big the dungeon is.

Clack, clack...

After turning several corners, I suddenly found myself face-to-face with some sort of black cloud.

“The hell is this?”

I hesitantly extended my hand. It didn’t really feel like anything, and it didn’t make my hand dirty either.

Hmm, should I keep going? It looks like the path continues... Well, it’s worth a shot. I’ll try walking. Wurgh, it’s pitch black! Nothing but darkness all around. Can’t see a damn thing.

I got a little scared, so I turned back. As soon as I did, I was able to see again.

Okay. Let’s just keep going then.

I breached the darkness once again. As I continued walking forward in the pitch-black corridor, I found that it quickly let up. I could see again.

That darkness had only seemed to last for about a block, so I guessed that this special zone was also attached to the blocks themselves.

One block later, I came upon another darkness zone. Figuring that this was just something that existed in this dungeon, I simply kept moving forward.

Light. Dark. Light. Dark. They alternate. What is this? As that thought crossed my mind, someone suddenly appeared.

“Oink!”

“Eeek!”

I’d ended up screaming reflexively, but when I took a second look, I recognized the face. *Oh, so it’s just one of the armed pig-people.* They were called orcs—incredibly rotund monsters with pink skin. There were five of them.

I think I saw them in the beginning during the not-explanation.

As for the orcs, they seemed incredibly surprised as well, as if they’d never expected someone to come out of the darkness. However, they also quickly realized I was a monster.

“Hello.”

“Oink oink oink!”

Yeeep, can't communicate at all. Is there anything I can do about this? This is pretty sad when there're so many allies in this dungeon.

"W-Well, do your best, you guys!"

"Oink!"

I tried raising my hand. They mirrored my action, and I felt like my intention to cheer them on got through to them. Yeah...

Ahh, but they should be careful of things coming in and out of that darkness zone. It seems like they could be caught off guard by adventurers the way things were going.

I passed by the piggies and continued northward.

"Oiiinnnk!"

After some progress, I heard the piggies screaming and squealing. I turned around, thinking that something had happened.

There were six adventurers—three warriors in front, and a thief, a priest, and a mage in the back.

The three warriors all attacked at once, instantly killing three of the orcs.

"I guess level 5 orcs *would* be easy."

"Don't let your guard down. Don't forget we're still new."

"We managed to kill three thanks to our preemptive strike. There's two, no...three left?"

Ah, looks like I'm included.

Then, the other two orcs were quickly cleaned up. *Slatarou's probably right. Monsters on the first underground floor can't stand up to adventurers at all.*

"So, what is that thing? A mimic? Well, a single level 10 should be easy."

The adventurers all turned their eyes towards me. I was soon surrounded by the uncomfortable feeling of being Analyzed again. I guess it was just common sense for adventurers to Analyze everything.

Let's see... Running would be easy, but I did cheer those orcs on. Even if we

just passed by each other, I need to avenge them! Well, I guess that's more of an excuse. Basically, I just wanna run some experiments on these guys—the type where I go all “Pow!” into their faces!

The warriors walked towards me with their shields raised.

3v1? How cautious. Anyway, time for the first experiment.

“Hiiiyaaaah!”

I kicked off the ground with full power. That *would've* been enough to instantly send me crashing into the ceiling, but I was ready for that. Then, I kicked off the ceiling and launched myself towards the warriors!

Kersplat!

I started by squishing one of them.

Ha ha ha! Die from my treasure chest corners! Let's see, why not call this move the Mimic Meteor?

“Wha—?!”

The adventurers gasped, their eyes practically popping out of their sockets. I slowly got up and approached a nearby warrior.

“Grah!”

The warrior swung his sword.

Time for experiment number two. It's a bit dangerous, but I need to see how much I can withstand.

Clang!

From that test, I understood that attacks from beginner warriors did nothing to me.

I should've expected that. After all, I'm so tough that I completely managed to crush an armored human without a single scratch.

“What is *wrong* with this thing?!”

Ohhh, they're panicking. They're totally panicking! That's understandable, though—anyone would after completely underestimating a mimic, only to find

out none of your attacks work on it. All right, next is experiment three!

I wanted to use Explosive Legs, but there was something I needed to test first.

I got in between the party's front and back lines, then I tackled one of the warriors. It didn't matter that he'd blocked me with his shield—I just needed to separate him from the group.

I withdrew a bit, putting some distance between us, then...

"Explosive Legs!"

I launched a mighty kick at the warrior.

Now, if this is the same as before, then...

KaBLAM!

The warrior exploded.

That took about...five seconds?

Call it a hunch, but it seemed like they blew up where the kick landed. Well, the subject had been reduced to smithereens, so it was only a hunch.

"W-Waaaggghh!"

The remaining four adventurers fled. They ran back from whence they came, into the darkness zone.

It's natural—one of their friends just suddenly exploded. Anyone would run away as fast as they could.

Whoosh!

I leapt forward, catching up to them almost immediately.

"Wha—?! Why?!"

The adventurers froze in shock. They thought they'd escaped, but I was there waiting for them when they emerged from the blackness. Yes, I'd gotten ahead of them!

"Ha ha ha! Didn't you know? You can't run from mimics!"

Ahh, well. Let's end playtime here.

“Explosive Legs!”

I dashed towards the warrior at the front of the group, kicked them, then created some distance between us. Five seconds later...

KaBOOM!

The warrior exploded. The thief, who was nearby, also took grievous damage from the warrior’s bits-turned-shrapnel. After another five seconds had passed...

BaBOOM!

The remaining thief, priest, and mage all blew up at once.

Yeah... Looks like an explosion chain. The warrior I’d separated before only exploded once, so I wonder if the chain only activates within a certain distance between targets?

I’d been weirdly excited ever since I’d left the burial chamber, but after I managed to calm down and think things through, my first impression was...

Holy crap, am I just really freakin’ strong?!

Chapter 7: Matchless Mimic

“Mimic Missile!”

“Bwoaarrggh!”

I landed a hit right into the novice warrior’s gut. It was just a tackle, though! Well...sure, you *could* say my skill was just a charge, but I did it at amazing super-fast speeds. It was actually really powerful!

“Wh-What?!”

The adventurers were flustered by my sudden attack.

I see, so it’s a standard six-person party. Let’s just get rid of the front line first.

“Mimic Pinball!”

I charged towards the walls and ceiling and began to ricochet all over the place. Yep, in other words, I was going berserk and causing a big mess. This was another move that seemed like I was just thoughtlessly flailing about, but it was actually extremely effective.

The warriors on the front line were turned into ground meat in the blink of an eye.

There’re two mages and a priest in the back. Looks like they’re totally scared.

“Hey, hey! Shoot some magic at me, I dare you!”

I motioned with my hand, taunting them to come at me. Though we couldn’t communicate with words, my gestures should’ve still gotten through.

“Y-Yoouuu! Fireball!”

One of the mages started to invoke magic, and soon a flaming orb manifested on the tip of their staff. After a beat, it flew at me.

KaFWOOM!

A direct hit!

I see... I get that all magic needs a chant, and that it appears from the staves, but it moves so fast that it's almost impossible to evade. Well, it's not like it's super dangerous to me, or anything, so whatever.

Yep, I'd taken that hit because I'd wanted to test whether or not I could withstand magic.

"No way!" the mage cried with an expression of utter disbelief.

Okay, now you can all become my exp!

"Explosive Legs!"

I rushed right in and kicked. The attack itself wasn't terribly strong; even the mage could withstand it. Unfortunately for them...

Kaboom!

Five seconds later, the mage exploded, and the party was totally wiped out.

That was easy peasy. I'm a little nervous since I'm basically relying on equipment, but why not use what I've got? Okay, what level am I now? Oh, level 11. Cool! Let's continue the hunt for adventurers!

"Drive-by Explosive Legs!"

Kaboom!

I performed a jump kick on some adventurers I happened to pass by.

My hapless victims might've wanted me to face them a bit more earnestly, but I had neither the time nor the desire to do so. The newbie adventurers on the first underground floor were total small fry to me now.

You all can just become my experience fodder! All righty, what level am I now?

I checked my stats; I was level 12.

Hmmm, I leveled up a while ago. My exp isn't going up at all. But I've beaten a bunch of adventurers... Is this just the limit for destroying newbies? Well, there's also the fact that I'm just not finding many adventurers anymore, no matter

how much I look. What should I do? Oh, right...

After I walked around the first floor for a while, I found that the size of the floor was only about 20x20 blocks. Each block was five meters squared, so it was about a hundred meters in all directions.

Well, if the enemies here aren't worth it, I guess the only option is to go down, isn't it? Let's start looking for the stairs!

Yep, even after all this time, I *still* hadn't found the stairs down. It was probably to the east—the direction I'd been avoiding ever since I'd found the dungeon's entrance.

It's kinda concerning that there were so many adventurers around the entrance, but oh well. It should all work out.

I walked along and arrived near block E0N0.

Once again, I peeked into the square from the northern side. The entrance was a set of stairs on block E0N0, and around it was a 4x4 block square. There were stalls lined up all around the perimeter of the square selling a variety of things.

Looks like there are a lot of food stalls. I wonder if there're other tools and stuff adventurers need as well.

It seemed like all the adventurers there were concentrating on prepping for the dungeon; they were checking equipment, confirming strategies, and following through with other final assurances.

It was like they all took the safety of the square for granted. There *were* a few guys on watch around the perimeter, but they all seemed completely relaxed... Probably because the occasional monster that dared to approach was always some first-floor weakling.

What is this? They've gone soft, haven't they? Things've gotten too peaceful here. Then the only way to fix that is to butt in, isn't it? Butt in, peace out!

True, I might've been suffering from delusions of grandeur, thinking that my power was my own, rather than from my high-level equipment. But I was a monster—a monster with instincts that thirsted for battle.

Even if I couldn't defeat all of them, I still wanted to wreak as much havoc as I could and put a roadblock in the adventurers' progress.

Well, if I don't stand a chance at all, there's no point in fighting. I'll just run in that case.

Anyway...

"Mimic Missile!"

To start off, I charged in full force.

"Drive-by Explosive Legs!"

Then, I jump-kicked one of the watchmen at the entrance of the square before heading straight inside.

"Explosive Legs!"

I kicked a nearby adventurer. They didn't seem to be ready for battle, but that was their fault.

You guys underestimating the dungeon?

"Explosive Legs! Explosive Legs! Explosive Legs!"

Dash and kick! Dash and kick! Dash and kick!

I need to get as many as I can before they regroup!

I just lashed out at anything I could. After I'd kicked up a storm, I ducked into the eastern passage.

KABOOBOOBOOBOOBOOOOOM!

I could hear the thundering of multiple blasts going off behind me.

Well, I did kick a lot of them. I bet all the explosions are overlapping each other.

I turned around to find that the square had been dyed completely crimson.

Yeah... I have no idea how strong they were, but I guess this was an easy—hm?

Something was wriggling in the bloodred mess.

Something survived? What should I do? Run?

No, it seems weak. Let's get closer and see what's going on.

Clack, clack.

It was an older warrior. His right half was in complete tatters, to say nothing of the lower half of his body—it'd been blown clean off. At least most of his left side remained intact, and his head was unscathed.

His shield and helmet were probably super tough. Still, I don't really get how defense works... Like, the defense bonus from my shoes extends to my whole body. So wouldn't that apply to everyone?

"Dammit... What the hell...are you?" the warrior groaned.

"A mimic that just happened to pass by. So what?"

Not that he can understand me, though.

"I need healing...no, I should teleport first..."

Huh? Teleport?

Something shiny appeared in the old man's left hand. *A jewel?* I thought, but I was immediately interrupted by a brilliant flash of light.

"Woargh! Too bright!"

I was blinded. As my sight recovered, I noticed that the old man was gone.

Ahh, so things can still be too bright, even without real eyes. I guess that means smokescreens and stuff would still work on me, huh? I need to be careful... Wait, no! He ran away! Oh, right—he teleported away. So I guess stuff like that exists... Oh well. It's not like genocide was my goal, so whatever, I guess. Now then...

I looked around. None of the stalls had been affected, so I approached one and looked over the merchandise.

"Eep!"

The lady behind the counter was stiff, her face frozen in fear.

She doesn't look like an adventurer... Don't think she'd be worth any exp even

if I killed her.

Her stall offered some kind of food that looked like a long piece of meat stuck between a piece of bread.

I wonder if I can eat this? That was when the question finally popped into my head—what exactly *was* I supposed to eat?

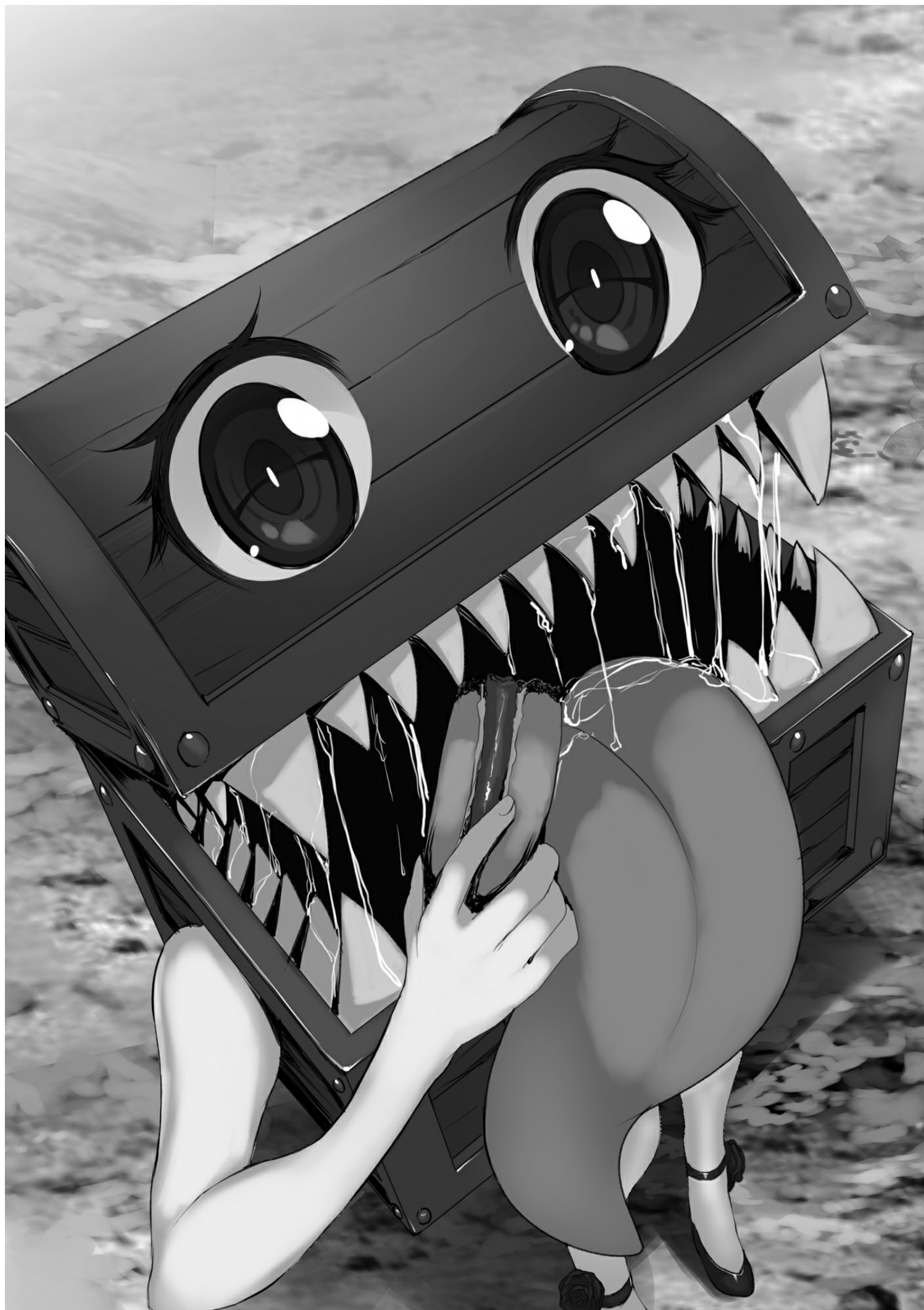
I hadn't consumed anything up until now, and I hadn't even felt hungry. Even though I wanted to defeat humans, I never felt like *devouring* them.

Hmm, well... Wardogs and orcs seem like they eat like normal creatures, but I'm a mimic... If someone said that I didn't need to eat, then I'd be inclined to trust them.

"It's worth a try. Gimme one of these."

Oh right, they can't understand me.

I extended my hand and took one of the pieces of bread. I had the feeling that tossing it inside me would just count as storing it, so I opted to open my lid and munch on it instead.



Oh, it's good. I can taste it, so it's not like I can't try food. I guess that makes sense, though—I mean, I do have fangs and a tongue.

"Thanks for the meal."

Let's look at the other stalls. So there're armor shops, weapons shops, and tool shops as well. Looks like there're all sorts of things for sale here; pretty much anything adventurers would need. Buuut I can't tell what any of them do... I wonder if I could if I had some kinda Appraisal-type skill? Anyway, everything seems useful, so I'll just grab it all for now.

I took anything that caught my eye and threw it inside me. Not for eating, obviously, but for storage. After I'd finished looting the place, I turned to my original objective: exploring the east side.

After a while, I came upon an elevator. It was the one I'd originally ridden in to get to this floor.

Hm, the first underground floor is too easy, so let's try going lower.

KerSNAP!

But when I tried to approach the elevator, something repelled me.

Huh? Is there something there?

I gently extended my hand.

KerSNAP!

As I thought, there's something blocking me. An invisible wall?

Apparently, I couldn't make use of the elevator.

Hmmm... I rode on it to come here, so maybe I can't use it when it's just me? Well, there's no point thinking about it when I can't use it. Let's just move on.

Clack, clack, clack.

After some exploration, I found a 2x2 block room. There was a huge, impressive-looking piggie inside. It donned armor and a mantle, and it looked slightly more important than your run-of-the-mill orc.

Ahh, so I guess this is, like, the first-floor boss? I can see stairs leading down in

the back.

“Hello!”

“Oink oink!”

When I raised my hand, the boss orc did the same. His friendly reaction told me that he wasn’t a bad one.

I continued walking towards the stairs, but that turned out to be a futile effort too. There was another invisible wall, just like with the elevator.

“So I really can’t head down, huh?”

“Oink oink.” The boss orc slowly shook his head.

So, it finally dawned on me that I couldn’t leave the first underground floor.

Seems like I’ll just need to do my best here for the season.

I went back to the starting square. All the survivors—those managing the stalls—had vanished.

I was told that I would die if I went outside, but I decided to try the stairs upward anyway.

Yep, there’s another invisible wall here. Just as I thought. Well, if I’m gonna be a monster on this floor, why not give it everything I’ve got?

That was when an adventurer came down the stairs. He froze upon seeing the state of the square.

“Wha—?! What the hell?!”

“Explosive Legs!”

KaBOOM!

Yeah... Wouldn’t the most efficient way be to just wait here for adventurers to come down?

Chapter 8: Side Story *The Aldora Labyrinth Council*

The Aldora Labyrinth council was, just as its name implied, a council formed to make decisions involving the stated dungeon. Its headquarters was located in one of the nearby cities, and adventurers who were heavily involved in the labyrinth were granted a council seat.

“Don’t fuck with me! What the hell does ‘double item drops campaign’ even *mean?!’*”

The council was currently gathered in their meeting room. The old man who’d just pounded his fist vehemently into the table was Walter, the presiding chairman. There were a total of three other people lined up beside him and a single woman standing across the table from them.

That woman—or arachne, rather—was none other than council member and Aldora Labyrinth’s very own tenth-floor boss, Marinnie. She was wearing a fancy dress with a cinched waist and a flowing, wide skirt that hid her lower half.

Incidentally, she tended to go naked while in the labyrinth. She was only wearing clothing at the meeting because she followed common sense and obeyed the humans’ social rules when appearing in front of them.

“You sure do like to yell... Look, there’s clearly been an increase in the number of treasure chests, right? It’s gotten to the point where it’s clearly obvious that the drop rate’s gone up! Like, I just thought it would be nice if we got everyone all pumped up to come explore—you know, since we’ve got all these rare items on the table?”

“What do you think the casualty rate for the first floor is right now?! It’s only been two days since the season started and it’s already at *fifty-four percent!* That’s crazy! Normally an entire season would see less than one percent in casualties, you know?! Something strange is clearly happening! How do you plan to settle this, huh?!”

What's he talking about? Marinnie thought. She'd wondered why she'd been suddenly called to the council; now that she'd come, she'd been met with nothing but belligerence. Then again, she also understood where the man was coming from—if such numbers were true, it was obvious he would want to complain.

Normally, Marinnie's job was to come up with the placement of monsters for each season, and that was it. It was a constant cycle of reading through the end-of-season reports, understanding the labyrinth's situation, and using that information to choose her placement in the next season.

In other words, she was still in the dark about the current situation in the first underground floor.

"Uhhh... Sure, but why're you yelling at me about that? The distribution of monsters is exactly according to what I handed you at the beginning of the season. You're the ones who get to look at that and decide if you want to challenge the floor. Doesn't that mean it's all your responsibility?"

Marinnie was in charge of setting the monsters from the first through the tenth floors. This was a fundamental duty of mid-bosses, and it was up to them to show their skill in keeping adventurer casualties within prescribed amounts through good placement.

It would be easy to make things as hard as possible, but then no adventurers would come. It was important to maintain that sweet spot—the perfect level of difficulty that would stir a human's gambling spirit and make them believe that they could do better than the last poor sap without discouraging them.

Which was all the more reason to worry about the adventurers that were being wiped out on the first floor. Killing fresh newbies who'd just wandered into the first floor had no merit to it, no matter how large the body count was.

The standard strategy for dungeon management was to maintain the perfect difficulty curve. Humans provided training courses for fresh-faced hopefuls, and these newcomers were given the ability to stock up on weapons and party members before entering the labyrinth. After they'd been given an appropriate amount of experience, the management would lure them down to the lower floors to kill them.

Of course, only weak monsters were placed on the first floor—the type that anyone could defeat. Only extreme eccentrics would dive head-first into a dangerous dungeon that could kill them from the very beginning. No place or its management would be able to survive a state like that.

Normally, the fatality rates should've been close to zero under the circumstances. Even one percent would've been rather high; the reason that amount was the expected mean was to account for the rare occurrence of monsters born with an extreme battle sense. That was something that level displays couldn't account for, since said monsters couldn't be detected until they were actually thrown into battle.

When all was said and done, nothing could be done about those anomalies but to try to account for them in advance. Still, no matter how strong such a monster might've been, a casualty rate of fifty-four percent was staggeringly, absurdly high.

“And we even lost our base camp! It was completely destroyed! What possessed you to make that decision?!”

Well, that's bad, Marinnie thought. “Uhhh, well...it's not like the base camp was in a guaranteed safe area, or anything?”

“Whaaat?!”

Of course, Marinnie knew that a base camp was constructed at the entrance, and that it was used to conveniently supply adventurers with whatever they needed. She had left it alone on purpose. That was just custom, however, and not a rule.

The only thing the dungeon side could do was publish a data sheet detailing monster placement and item drop rates, then promise to keep things to the stated values.

“Yeahhh, so...your anger is justified, but... We don't know what happened either. The only thing I can think of is that, like, maybe an incredible monster was born from a sudden mutation or something. But you'd already factored that into your expectations, right?”

“Regardless, we object to this strongly! Do something about it! *Now!*”

“Well, if you’re going to put it like *that*, I guess I’ll do some digging... But I can only change monster placements after the season ends, so why not just wait till then?”

“Listen here—if you won’t fix this, then we’ll have to consider sending in a hero, got it?! If you think we can’t do such a thing because we’re a provincial city, you’d be dead wrong!”

“Ah ha ha...a hero, huh? D’you silly humans think you’d scare me with that?”

“Wha...?!”

The sudden change in Marinnie’s voice had caused Walter to flinch. But that had lasted only a moment—she was quickly back to her usual laid-back self.

“You know what, though? If we could get a hero in our dungeon, we’d gain some prestige...”

“Y-Yoouuu! Do you understand what I’m saying?! I’m talking about a hero, here! A dinky little dungeon like yours wouldn’t hold a candle to one!”

“Anywaaays, I’ve received your request, so I’ll take my leave. By the way, we *are* a dungeon, so we welcome any challengers!”

With that, Marinnie left. She exited the building, walked through town, and returned to the labyrinth. It seemed to her that they were picking a fight, so she’d responded in kind, but she actually had no clue what was going on all the way until the end.

“A hero, huh? I wonder if Lord Aldora would be mad if one really came?”

No matter what happens, I need to figure out what’s happening first. Then I can choose what I’ll do.

Marinnie decided to head to the first floor of the Aldora Labyrinth.

After Marinnie left, Walter looked over to the man to his right—a bespectacled merchant named Satoh.

“So?”

Satoh seemed exasperated. “She’s always like that, so it’s hard to know if she’s telling the truth, but...it didn’t seem like she was playing dumb. Anyway, you want to send in a hero? Where would we get the funds for that? Who do you expect would pay for it?”

“*They’re* the ones who messed this all up first! It’ll be fine—I have a lead on the funds. One of the kids on that decimated beginner’s tour was the child of a noble. If we rile him up...”

“Chairman, you know that heroes vary wildly, right? Do you even have any connections with one in the first place?”

Walter remained silent.

“So you don’t! And you were still using one as a threat?!”

“I-I didn’t have a choice! A hero was the only thing I could think of that could destroy a dungeon!”

“Why are you trying to destroy it?! It’s common sense to squeeze a dungeon for all it’s worth! It’s a mutually beneficial arrangement. Also, do you have a plan for what to do after the labyrinth is destroyed? It’s basically financially supporting our town single-handedly, isn’t it?”

Walter had no reply.

“No plan either?!”

“Anyway, we should sort out what we know at the moment,” another man—a warrior named Bison—said gravely. “To start: the cause of all the first-floor casualties is a mimic.”

“Mimics are those things that pretend to be treasure chests, right?” Satoh asked.

“That’s impossible! Mimics are the type of monster where—worst-case scenario—you get a small bite if you mess up!” Walter cried.

“I know it is hard to believe, but a silver-class adventurer by the name of Johannes who survived testified as such. He’s trustworthy.”

Apparently, Johannes had barely managed to teleport out of the dungeon after losing most of his body.

“So, as for the mimic in question... Well, it had legs,” Bison continued.

“A *mimic* did? You’re joking, right?” Walter asked, incredulous.

“No, I’m not. Once again, that came straight out of Johannes’s mouth. And I repeat, he’s trustworthy.”

“Well, whatever. So we know it has legs, but how does that lead to so many deaths?”

“It was also wearing red high heels.”

“Huh? Are you fucking with me?”

“No, I assure you I am not. That was what Johannes said, and he is trustworthy.”

“Yeah, we get it. You trust this guy way too much,” Satoh finally retorted. Though he seemed like the serious sort with his glasses, he was actually rather comically inclined.

“As for the high heels in question...here,” Bison said as he took a piece of paper from his pocket.

There was a sketch detailing a pair of high heels on it, so accurate and lifelike that a person could believe that they were looking at the real thing.

“This is...a rose motif? Anyway, this is an amazing drawing. You had someone do this, didn’t you? Work of this quality actually calls things into question. For example, are you sure there weren’t any problems in the description?”

“Johannes, the one who witnessed it firsthand, drew it himself. He is trustworthy.”

“Just how much of a genius *is* Johannes?!”

“Anyway, what’s the problem with this thing?” Walter asked as he stared fixedly at the drawing.

“This is a legendary item named Crimson Rose. There’s no way something like this would be in a place like our Aldora Labyrinth. That means that someone

brought it in from the outside,” Bison explained.

“Mm? Which means...”

“Exactly. If all this is true, then that would indeed indicate that Miss Marinnie had nothing to do with this, and no knowledge of it either...”

“Hey, you should’ve told me earlier! No, this is still under the dungeon’s purview, so I wasn’t in the wrong!” Walter cried, shaking away the fear that threatened to creep into him and tell him that he had been rash.

If all this was true, the only one that could’ve brought in such an item would’ve been an adventurer. In other words, *they* would be at fault; this travesty would just be them reaping their just deserts.

“So? What kind of item is it?”

“First, as a legendary item, it boasts unparalleled defense. It’s not like we’ve appraised it, so we don’t know the exact numbers, but it should at the very least be around this much.” As he spoke, Bison pulled out another piece of paper with statistics on it.

Defense: 5000

Maximum life: +10000%

Elemental resistance: 80%

Physical resistance: 80%

Magic resistance: 80%

Ranged attack resistance: 80%

Melee attack resistance: 80%

“What?! Are you sure this isn’t a mistake? This defensive stat is far too high, isn’t it?”

“This is more than just legendary! This is the first time I’ve ever even seen percentile buffs!”

“Indeed. As for those percentile resistances... Let’s suppose there was a

Fireball with a power of 10,000.”

“There’s no such thing as a Fireball that strong!”

“It’s a ranged fire-elemental spell. So with Crimson Rose equipped, the damage would be reduced to 2000 because of its elemental resistance, then to 400 because of magic resistance, and, finally, to 80 because it’s also a ranged attack. And even after all that, the remaining damage would still be negated thanks to the absurdly high defense stat.”

“That’s ridiculously strong! There’s no way we can believe that’s the truth!”

“I’d also like to remind you that these are the *minimum* numbers—it could actually be even stronger. More importantly, the real problem is the skill it possesses. Apparently it is something that confers the explosive trait.”

“I’ve never heard of such a trait! I’d get fire, wind, water, or something like that, but what the hell is ‘explosive’?!”

“I suppose it must mean that it explodes and tears itself apart,” Satoh explained.

“I’m not asking for the *literal* meaning! Actually, where did you even get info on such a shady-sounding item?! It’s not like intel on legendary items is something that’s just spread around, right?!”

“Johannes knew about it. He’s trustworthy.”

“You trust that Johannes guy way too much! Just bring him here already!”

It seemed that the problems in the first underground floor would persist for a while longer.

Chapter 9: Boss

I probably went way too far, since adventurers have stopped coming around! Oopsies!

Yeah, uh... I tried sticking my tongue out all playfully right now, but I don't think it had the effect I was going for. It sure made an impact, though. Curse my huge mouth and my extra-long tongue.

Okay, I should cut it out—it's not like I'm cute enough to pull it off.

Oh, right—I found out recently that my tongue was actually quite dextrous. In fact, if I didn't have any limbs, my tongue would've been the only part I could've put to any use...at least, in my opinion.

Anyway, it was only natural for adventurers to grow wary and stay away from the dungeon after how many I'd killed.

There was also that one adventurer that managed to escape by teleporting. I'm pretty sure I've been found out. Right...

Though not everyone could use it, it seemed that at least seasoned-looking mages could teleport. There were also items that did the same thing.

Makes sense. It's obvious to prepare an emergency escape option—their lives are on the line here, after all. But since there're also people who don't have that item, I think it's safe to assume that it's pretty expensive, at least.

I was, as always, hanging out around the entrance of the dungeon. I'd checked the time with Slatarou earlier. We were about to head into the third day, so it was currently nighttime.

So, anyway—since I'd just been sitting here, destroying adventurers left and right, this place was a hellscape of gore and agonized screams! Or...that's how it *should've* been, in my opinion, but the place was clean.

Every time I killed someone, the cleaning crew—the same three I'd seen on the first day—would come by a little while after.

It's always the same faces too. I wonder if they're assigned by floor?

They always dropped by quietly, did their work without any unnecessary complaining or conversation, and then left just as quickly as they came. I could seriously feel their professionalism. But it also seemed that there were some stains that hadn't been able to be removed, thanks to yours truly taking things too far. At least, that was what it felt like.

Oh, look—there's a stain on the wall! It kinda looks like a tortured human face if I squint at it... I'm sure it's just my imagination! Yep!

"Oh, but if an adventurer dies and comes back as a ghost, do they count as monsters?" I wondered out loud to myself.

"Adventurers who die here have everything used up—from their body to their souls—so I don't think there's anything left to become ghosts," a voice replied.

I turned around from the wall stain that had distracted me to see a figure descending the stairs.

Huh? It can understand me? So that means it's a monster, right?

The mysterious entity turned out to be a naked woman with a familiar face. More importantly, my danger senses were tingling something fierce; I instinctively knew that I was looking at someone I shouldn't try to oppose.

She was the monster who'd given me that lame excuse for an explanation when I'd first woken up—Marinnie, the arachne and tenth-floor boss.

So she's in charge? I thought. "Oh, uhh... Good eve—"

"Whoa, what's this? A mimic? Am I right? But why does it have legs? And why is it here?"

Huh? I thought she was more of a cute, ditzy, and energetic kind of lady, but she seems genuinely surprised. Wow, that's kind of a shock...

She seemed to regroup quickly, though, since she almost immediately returned to how she was when I first met her.

"Ahh, sorry, sorry. You're Harumi, right? I'm Marinnie. D'you remember me?"

"Yes. Umm, sorry I'm like this..." I lowered my head. I knew how strange I

looked.

“Don’t worry about that. Anyways, could you explain why you’re wandering around outside?”

I told her the truth, divulging everything that happened to me up until now. *Ah, she’s clutching her head in her hands.*

“Huh? But wouldn’t that mean it’s not our fault? In other words, they have no reason to complain to us!” Marinnie cried. Her expressions cycled like a wheel, jumping from surprise to joy to anger.

Meanwhile, I could almost feel my imaginary heart pounding away inside me. After all, I knew that I’d gone too far. If she were to scold me for ambushing adventurers at the entrance, well, I could only agree with her.

At first, she seemed like the lazy type—like she only does the bare minimum. So doesn’t the fact that she came all the way up here to ask for an explanation show how bad the situation is? Doesn’t this mean I’m super guilty? Will she be mad at me? Am I...gonna be executed?! No, I’ll object if it comes to that. I mean, I was thrown in here with no explanation! How could you possibly have a problem with my actions?

Since the power imbalance between us was so great, I kept my mouth shut. Regardless of how much beefier I’d gotten, this had nothing to do with personal strength.

I mean, just take the fact that I wasn’t able to leave this floor as an example. I wasn’t sure *why*, but I knew instinctively that it was because of Marinnie.

Marinnie finally seemed to notice how scared I was and smiled.

“Ah, sorry about ignoring you like that! Of course you’d be worried since I suddenly showed up and all. It’s fine, don’t worry. This whole incident isn’t your fault.”

“Really?!”

“Yeah, really! I’m not the type to foist the blame on kids who were just doing their job!”

I couldn’t help but slump to the floor in relief. The exhaustion when tension

slips out of you is no joke.

“Anyway, I was just quiet because I was trying to think of what to do. This whole thing is a pretty big incident.”

“Um... If it isn't too forward of me, could I ask for details?”

“The adventurers complained to us. That's why I was out meeting them.”

Oh, right—Marinnie did come from the outside. Wait, but doesn't that mean that she was...outside? I thought monsters couldn't leave?

“D'you think it's strange that I was with humans? Normally, they're the enemy, but it'd also be a problem if they stopped dungeon diving. That's why we make contact with them to make sure that doesn't happen.”

“I was wondering about that too, yeah, but I heard that monsters couldn't leave the dungeon?”

“Oh, we can...if we have the permission of the dungeon's lord, that is. That would be Lord Aldora in this case.”

I see. So that means I'm not just shut inside this place forever. Wait, no... I wonder... I don't think I'd be able to get permission so easily...

“Anyway, they said that the casualty rates for the first floor were too high, and they wanted me to do something about it.”

“Ahh... Isn't that all because of me, then?” *I've killed basically every adventurer I've seen, after all.*

“Seems so, huh?”

“Umm, am I going to get executed...or something?”

I began to feel worried. Although she said that she wouldn't blame me, I could see a situation where she followed that up with, “...but you're a problem, so I'm still gonna get rid of you!” I mean, *she* was the one who said that almost all of us on the first floor would die. Wouldn't that mean that I was insignificant in her eyes?

“As if! Your job is to kill adventurers, so it's all A-okay in my book!” Marinnie exclaimed with a bright smile and a thumbs-up.

Oh, what I was doing was fine! That's great to hear.

"Then again, it's true that erasing you would be the fastest and cleanest way to clear things up."

Huh?! Wait a second, what's with the change in tone?! It doesn't match up with what you're saying!

"But that doesn't sit right with me... Killing a child who was just giving it their all for the sake of my own convenience, I mean. I hate stuff like that."

Your eyes are scaring me! You're freakin' terrifying when you get serious! Please go back to joking around!

"Ah, ummm... I'll stop killing adventurers if you tell me to..."

"Seriously? At this point?"

"Yeah... Ah, then how about if I handed you these high heels?"

If it weren't for these, I would just be a weak monster. Though I'd managed to raise my level a bit, I still wouldn't stand a chance against a group of adventurers. I'd simply die if I had to fight with my base abilities.

This makes sense as a way to settle things. I'd still prefer to live, though.

"I won't ask for that. Whatever you get from adventurers is yours!"

Oh, is that how it is? That's a relief. I'd be in checkmate if I had these taken from me!

"But at the same time, I can't give you anything, Harumi. That would be a violation of the rules."

So that implies that the items given to monsters on every floor is determined at the beginning, and that it can't change once the season starts. However, it's possible for monsters to take equipment and the like from adventurers and use them.

"I'm also not allowed to come cheer you on, so you'll just have to do your best on your own, Harumi. But they're the ones who picked a fight, and women need to respond in kind! Don't you agree?"

"Uhhh, I'm not sure I'm picking up what you're putting down."

Me? Fight?

“Oh, didn’t I tell you? They’ll probably send an extermination force after you, Harumi.”

“What?!”

“They’re pretty mad out there. They even threatened to send in a hero! Well, I’m pretty sure there won’t be one—they’re crazy expensive, after all. But still, something should be coming for you.”

“Ummm... Then, what should I do?”

“Your best!”

Ugh, that was some terrible encouragement.

“No, but, um... Is that all? If a hero actually came, they wouldn’t just stop at defeating me, right? If that’s the case, then killing me now would be...”

I don’t actually want to die, got it? I don’t, seriously! But as a member of this dungeon, I need to give some thought to the needs of the many.

Heroes are insanely scary. My monster instincts knew that. They told me that heroes were a one-man party who could clear entire dungeons by themselves. They were bigger monsters than *actual* monsters. They would obviously think of going all the way down into the depths of the dungeon after they’d slaughtered me.

“That won’t happen. Even if we’re destroyed for it, we can’t allow those humans to underestimate us.”

Ahh, so this place is more warlike than I expected.

Chapter 10: Preparation

“...So anyway, that’s what happened.”

“Wow, things sure got out of hand!” my senior, Slatarou, exclaimed with surprise.

I’d returned to his room right after parting with Marinnie. Apparently, a monster being out of its assigned floor was really bad, so she couldn’t stay on the first floor for too long.

It turns out that she was quite reliable and proper in that regard, even though she normally seemed to be super carefree.

“So, what’re you gonna do? There’s gonna be a team put together to take you out, right?”

“Well, one option is to just keep running...”

My information was already out in the open, so they would surely come up with countermeasures for my abilities. It was safe to assume that I wouldn’t be able to win so easily next time.

At least, that was what Marinnie had told me. She was right—I couldn’t afford to be so optimistic about things. The reason why I’d been able to win so far was because everyone had underestimated me.

“But apparently there’re spells and items that can tell you the locations of monsters.”

“Well, if they’re coming after you for real, then it makes sense. Really, it’s the least they could do to prepare.”

“Also, I’m not completely comfortable with running away without at least *trying* something else...”

“Yeah, you *were* originally meant to be a stationary trap. I don’t think I would run either, even if I was told I could.”

He was right. I was supposed to be a treasure chest to fool adventurers. It was

almost like running around was against my nature.

Well, if there's no chance of victory, then I'd still run.

"So I was trying to think of what I'd do if I *were* to fight, but I pretty much drew a blank in the end. All I could come up with was winging it when the time comes, since I have no idea what to expect."

If I were mobbed by a ton of adventurers, I was planning to just blow them all up at once. But if they really *did* know a lot about me, then I had no idea what kind of countermeasures they'd come up with.

"But still, isn't there...*something* you can do?"

"Yep, there is. Marinnie told me she couldn't add more monsters or give me anything, but I did manage to get permission for a few things."

"Permission?"

"First, I can use the boss room. Only up to six adventurers can enter that room at a time, so I'd probably be able to manage them somewhat."

Unfortunately, there was also a demerit to using the boss room—it was a "two men enter, one man leaves" type of situation. Once inside, no one could leave until the fight was settled one way or the other. In other words, I couldn't escape if things looked rough for me.

"Second, I'm allowed to take monsters that're in rooms and place them outside," I continued.

"What? As like, decoys?"

"It's better than nothing, isn't it?"

"Wow. You're kinda awful, you know that? I guess that's just how monsters are, though."

"Well, we're all here to fight adventurers anyway, right? So like, why not do it all together?"

Monsters were largely categorized into two types: wandering monsters who walked the corridors, and room monsters who waited to ambush adventurers in various chambers. In other words, I was able to turn room monsters into

wandering monsters.

Normally, this sort of idea was frowned upon because it increased the difficulty of the dungeon. But, ultimately, it didn't change the total number of monsters on the floor or their stats, so I got the green light.

"But even if you gather a bunch of first-floor monsters together, there won't be much they can do, right?"

"They've gotta be able to serve as distractions at least, right?"

"Really, just awful."

I couldn't converse with most monsters, so there was no way I could consult with them and come up with a plan. My best bet would probably be to confuse the adventurers over how many monsters there were.

Well, I wasn't hoping for much. But if they could at least buy some time...

"There's only two more days until the end of the season... I hope the humans drag their feet," Slatarou said.

"That would be nice, wouldn't it? According to Marinnie's prediction, though, they have the ability to do something before time's up...even if they drag their feet a little."

"I see. Oh, right, what's your current level?"

"12. There won't be any newbies coming anymore, so it'll be hard to raise it any higher than it is."

"I'll say this just in case—you can't raise your levels by defeating monsters, got it?"

"Aha ha ha ha... Don't joke, I would never do that..."

Oh, is that so?

I'd actually toyed with the idea of gathering some of them together and blowing them all up at once for some extra exp...but I was just *toying* with the idea, okay?! It randomly popped into my head! Seriously!

"Well, to be exact, it's not like you won't get *any* experience...but the system for dealing with that sort of thing is difficult to work with. There's a lot of stuff

involved, like priority in retrieving souls.”

Apparently, the way leveling worked was that when something died, their soul and spirit would leave and scatter. Living things would then absorb that to get stronger.

“Oh yeah, did you learn anything about your stats?” Slatarou continued.

“Yeah, I asked about that...”

Marinnie had said that I could inquire about anything, so I’d asked her everything that came to mind.

“My gift, ‘The Beautiful Die Young,’ makes me beautiful in exchange for an eventful life, destined to be full of ups and downs. So it’s not, like, guaranteed that I’ll live a short life.”

“So you’re...beautiful...?”

“I actually have no idea. By human standards, I guess my arms and legs might be? Apparently, the reason I even have them is a possible side effect of the gift.”

“I see... Right... Maybe because there’s no way to show beauty if you’re stuck as a treasure chest?”

“Marinnie said that gifts are totally random, so it wasn’t something she gave me specifically. That reminds me, what’s yours?”

“Me? Mine is ‘Fast as Lightning.’”

“But...you can’t move, right?”

“Nope. Actually, wait—I can fall pretty dang fast.”

“What a waste of a gift, huh?”

“Oh, shut it. You’re pretty much in the same boat, aren’t you?”

I see. Looks like it’s true that it’s completely random. Seems like monster races don’t factor in at all.

“Anyway, it doesn’t seem like my gift will be useful for combat. I don’t know if it’s because I was able to use my Mimicry skill to grow these limbs, but it’s the only other form I’ve got.”

“Ahh, right... It would’ve been nice if you could’ve changed into something other than a treasure chest.”

“Exactly. If I *could*, I would’ve been able to hopefully disguise myself so they’d pass me by.”

No adventurer would leave a treasure chest alone upon seeing one—it was an ingrained habit for them.

“The more I hear, the more I feel like it’s totally hopeless for you...well, good luck.”

“No wait, c’mon! You’re my senior, Slatarou—you *gotta* help me! I even got you permission to go outside!”

“You know that’s impossible for me! The only thing I can do is fall! How much time do you think it takes for me to climb back up once I drop?!”

“Awww what, you won’t help me? Not even a little bit? Just the tip!”

He was *not* into that, let me tell you.

Anyway, now I was in the dungeon’s entrance square. If I was going to get found anyway, it would be useless to hide.

You might’ve been wondering why I wasn’t hiding in the boss room. That plan was just a countermeasure in case I was totally swarmed by enemies, not my default one. After all, I wouldn’t be able to run once I was in there, which was a *major* disadvantage.

Also, if I were to wait in there, then I’d have to spend time with the boss orc for...who knows how long. That would be super awkward.

But, jeez, what’s taking them so long? I’ve been here for a while... Wait, don’t tell me they’re busy with that thing. You know, that thing that’s unique to humans—passing the blame on to someone else, holding meetings for the sake of meetings, etcetera. Maybe they aren’t able to move forward because of all the red tape?

Just as I was thinking about how nice it would’ve been if that were the case, I heard footsteps coming from the stairs.

They're here!

From what I could gather, there were a few people—more than one, but not a huge crowd either.

All right... As much as I'd like to see what's coming, I can't wait too long—I'm pretty sure they'll try to kill me immediately.

My current position would be bad news in a fight. I wasn't able to climb the stairs at all, so it'd quickly turn into a one-sided slaughterfest if they were to attack me from the stairs. I dashed off into a corridor.

Chapter 11: Side Story *Aldora Labyrinth Mimic's Extermination Team Selection Meeting*

It was noon on the fourth day of Aldora Labyrinth's 389th season. Meanwhile, inside a nearby town's Adventurer's Guild, Walter, the chairman; Satoh, the merchant; and Bison, the warrior were looking at each other.

"This seems to be it for applicants. I believe we did very well, considering the fact that we started in the middle of the night," Satoh said.

Applicant forms were lined up across the table. Walter was up in arms about sending in a hero, but the council had neither the funds nor the connections to accomplish that. As a result, they had no choice but to recruit the brightest stars amongst the town's adventurers. These hopefuls were to kill the mimic and retrieve its item.

"But is there really a need to go out of our way and send in an extermination team? There's only two days left—including today—in the season. It looks like they've identified the problem too, so it should be solved by next season. I don't think they'll make the same mistake," Satoh said.

They'd already implemented entrance restrictions, so the problem would be solved by tomorrow. Sure, the restrictions were causing a major loss economically speaking, but it was the lesser of two evils. Sending in an elite team to forcefully end the threat would've only bled their funds dry. After all, neither selecting and deploying such a team would be free.

"Are you an idiot?! Why are you satisfied with being looked down upon by the likes of a *monster*?! Do you really think we'd be able to maintain our working relationship from here on out with that kind of thinking?!" Walter yelled. He was getting on in years, but he was still as lively as ever.

"Indeed, our chairman has a point. The season may almost be over, but we need to take our relationship to the dungeon hereafter into account. We suffered heavy losses, so they need to be held accountable. If we simply let

them slide because there was no violation of the regulations, they might try the same thing again in the future. We must not allow this to happen again. In order to ensure that, we need to show them our position on the matter, as well as our willingness to enforce it,” Bison said in a grave tone.

These three were the pillars of the council. Although such a position may have sounded lofty and important, the truth was that they were simply the only three who ever showed up. No one else liked these kinds of debates.

“But the whole reason that mimic is going on a rampage is because some adventurer gave it an item. At least, that’s what seems to be the case...” Satoh muttered.

“Even so, we can’t just afford to let the mimic—who’s the one massacring our adventurers—go, right? Our losses are astronomical. If you were told that this was all just because of an item, would you be okay with that? I wouldn’t. If we allow the season to end, then the monsters will be moved to new places. If we’re going to kill it, then it has to be *now*.”

“Not to mention the item’s already in the monster’s possession, even if we aren’t sure who was responsible for giving it to them. In other words, if we were to kill them, then the legendary item would be ours! Think of the huge profits!”

“Old man...what’s with the villainous look?” Satoh asked, a little creeped out by Walter’s evil expression.

Although the adventurers were also tasked with retrieving the mimic’s item, they would only be rewarded with money.

“Still, these were all we got?” Walter asked.

“This is still a lot.”

“Indeed. We ought to focus on quality, not quantity—if we were to simply rely on numbers, there would be several casualties in the inevitable explosions. This should be done by a small team of elites,” Bison noted.

“Elites, huh? I see. These applicants look rather strong, but...um, did we really have people like this in town?” Walter tilted his head in confusion.

“Well, adventurers tend to travel a lot. It would be rarer to find ones who stay in one place a long time.”

“Right... Well, we have George, the Severing Sword; Saygo, the Iron Sand; Norton, the Polar Star; Mackenzie, the Dirty Thief; and Holcomb, the Lightly Armored. They’re all famous adventurers!” Bison exclaimed.

“Wait a second—wasn’t there a weird one in there?”

“Dirty thief just means he’s just a criminal, doesn’t it? No, wait...saying that puts the entire thief class into question...”

He looked at the photo attached to the profile sheet. Mackenzie was hiding his face with a cloth, making the picture absolutely useless.

“Wait, this Holcomb guy...he’s topless!”

Sure enough, Holcomb’s photo featured a full-faced smile and his bare upper half. The council members could only pray that he was wearing something below.

“Lightly armored?! He’s not armored at all!”

“Yeah... He’s famed for fighting with only his body.”

Satoh paused, a terrible premonition welling up inside him, and muttered, “Could it be...we didn’t get any decent applicants at all?” He looked over the applications once again. Now that the idea had gotten into his head, all of them had begun to look more and more suspect. “W-Well, I’m just thankful that they applied. The reward we posted isn’t exactly worth the risk they’re taking on, after all.”

Maybe we only got the eccentrics and weirdos because we tried to scrimp too much on the rewards, Satoh thought to himself. He couldn’t help but feel a little regretful.

“There were no applications from any heroes?” Walter asked.

“Why would there be? There aren’t even any heroes in a small town like this to begin with! And even if there were, we wouldn’t be able to afford them!”

“You’re wrong—there is a hero in this town,” Bison said, looking like he’d chewed on something bitter. “Johannes told me about it, and he is

trustworthy.”

“Thought so!” Satoh retorted.

“Ohh, then we might get a hero after all!”

“Even if there are heroes around, I don’t think they’d come for this... Could something be done about that, Bison?”

“Well, I do have *one* connection to a hero...”

“What?! Then why didn’t you say so earlier?!”

“Wait, really?! Oh, but I’m sure that...”

“I know a man named Azuratt. His strength is almost entirely unknown, but he’s a thief who’s accompanied many heroes in their parties.”

“Not Johannes?! I was sure from the way the conversation was going—”

“What are you talking about? Johannes is very good, but he’s only silver ranked. He’s not strong enough to accompany heroes on their adventures.”

There were a total of eight adventurer ranks—excluding heroes, who were another category entirely. These ranks, from highest to lowest, were as follows: platinum, gold, silver, iron, copper, bronze, wood, paper. Only those of platinum class would be able to keep up with a hero.

“Now that you mention it, he returned after being almost done in by the mimic. He wouldn’t be that strong, huh?”

“Indeed. He was able to instantly identify the safest place to shelter in the middle of overlapping explosions and the resulting shock waves. Even then, he knew that he wouldn’t be able to escape unscathed, so he concentrated all his aura to his head and a single arm so that he could use an item. He only barely survived by sacrificing the rest of his body. If you want to say that, then you’d be right...”

“No, he’s plenty amazing! What kind of split-second decision-making skills and guts does someone need to have to be able to do that?!”

“So, will this Azuratt guy—or whatever his name is—introduce us to a hero? He wouldn’t think to charge us money for it, would he?”

“Of course he would. Having a connection to a hero—let alone several—is very valuable, you know? Who wouldn’t use that for profit?”

“No, he’s not that motivated by money, actually. His area of interest lies only in women’s legs.”

“That, um...that seems like it’d be trouble in another sense entirely... Well, why not try giving him a call, at least?”

“I did. He should be here soon.”

With perfect timing, a single man entered the meeting room.

“Well met, Azuratt. Thanks for coming this late.”

Azuratt was a slim man with eyes that barely opened past slits. It wasn’t clear just from his outward appearance whether he was strong or not—he didn’t seem to be the type to put out an oppressive aura.

“I don’t mind. I heard you wanted me to put you in touch with a hero? Did you mean right away?”

“Yes. They would need to be in the dungeon by tomorrow at the latest.” Bison relayed a simplified version of what had happened so far in the dungeon.

“I understand the situation. If you need someone who’s in this town and can sortie immediately, that would be Deimos, the Lion’s Blade, but...” Azuratt responded vaguely.

“What, is there something wrong?” Walter pressed.

“He’s actually en route to another labyrinth and just happened to stop by this town. Unless you’re willing to *really* grease the wheels, I don’t think you’ll be able to hire him.”

“Ahh... Would it be all right to at least talk to him about it? Would that be acceptable to you too, chairman?”

“Y-Yeah. He might be some eccentric who’d help us anyway for some reason...”

“I’d suggest putting yourself in his shoes and asking the same question first,” Satoh remarked snidely. Unfortunately for him, his retort hadn’t seemed to

have gotten through to the optimistic chairman.

“Understood. Then I’ll get to it,” Azuratt said before leaving.

“Oh,” Walter said after a pause. “That was anticlimactic. You were saying stuff about his love for women’s legs, so I thought he was gonna give us some sort of ridiculous condition.”

“I thought so too. But I wonder about him not asking for anything at all... My merchant’s instincts are saying there’s something suspicious going on.”

Right after Azuratt left, the applicants for the extermination force arrived.

After he’d left the Adventurer’s Guild, Azuratt finally allowed himself a slight smile.

I suspected as much when I found out about the entrance restriction, but that mimic really did survive. Now then, I’ll really need to start looking for a way to get her out of there...

To Azuratt, her form was truly ideal. From its perfect shape, to the feel of her skin, to the color of her complexion, everything about her legs were perfect. He’d never seen such a beautiful pair before. And, most importantly, she didn’t have any unnecessary parts.

Azuratt had absolutely no interest in anything other than legs. He’d collected several pairs up until now, but naturally, they didn’t last long on their own. And preserving them was out of the question—neither stuffing them or putting them on ice maintained their original form.

But there was no need to worry about that with her. As a monster, she would stay like that forever...as long as she wasn’t killed, anyway. Azuratt would be able to love and adore those legs, and those legs alone, for eternity.

Just imagining it almost led him to climax, but he couldn’t allow himself to drown in his fantasies. If he didn’t put some actual countermeasures in place soon, then it was possible not even the Crimson Rose could help her.

“So the problem would be heroes... And they want me to introduce them to one...”

A single legendary item probably wouldn't mean much against a hero. The Aldora Labyrinth was a small-scale dungeon with a difficulty level of only two. As a third-rank hero, Deimos would never bother with such a labyrinth, but who could say for sure? He could very well be caught with a sudden flight of fancy and decide to take it on.

So Azuratt decided to confirm the hero's plans first.

Chapter 12: The Thief, the Mage, and the Macho Man

It seemed like my hunters had finally come, so I broke out into a dash. I headed in the direction of the boss room, but since it seemed like they were coming with a smaller team, I decided to start with plan B.

Oh, sorry—I didn't actually have a plan A, only a plan B and C.

I ran full speed, turned a corner, and lay in wait. Yep, plan B was just an ambush! Though I expected them to know where I was, I wasn't sure how accurately they'd be able to pin down my position. That was the first thing I needed to test out.

"Ge he he he he! D'ye really think ye can hide like that?!" I heard a man's incredibly crude voice coming closer.

So they really do know where I am—I should've booked it before they saw me. The plan is still to wait, though. Actually, wait...aren't they just broadcasting their positions by shouting like this? What're they, idiots?

The footsteps drew closer. From the sound of it, there was only one of them. If they had all come at me together, I would've been able to sweep them all at once with explosions. They'd probably taken that into account already.

So they're going to go for 1v1s, huh? Well, that's fine by me—I just need to pick them off as they come, then. Oh, he's almost here!

Badump, badump!

The man finally rounded the corner and revealed himself. He hid his face behind a cloth, and in general his appearance and demeanor just *screamed* "Thief!"

"Wha—?!"

He froze in shock. Why? Because countless treasure chests currently filled the corridor. There was one here, one there, another over there, a few behind

there, and, oh yeah—more over that way. Yep, they were everywhere.

Of course, I'd withdrawn my limbs so I could hide amongst them. I called it, "Operation if a treasure chest is gonna hide, it's gotta be among a bunch of treasure chests!" I won't apologize for making the title so long and obvious!

Anyway, this was something I'd come up with when I was considering how to make full use of everything on the first floor.

"Dammit! Which one's the mimic?!"

I had a vague hunch that he wouldn't have been able to pinpoint me. Since the dungeon was made by blocks, I figured that monster tracking would also be done by blocks. In other words, packing an area full of treasure chests made it impossible to tell which one the mimic was at first glance!

"Wait...if I look at its status, then—"

"Mimic Missile!"

"Gwhhhbooarrgh!"

Instantly, I grew my arms and legs and shot forwards like a bullet. The thief-like man, who was caught between me and the wall, groaned miserably.

I backed up, and the man slumped limply to the floor.

"Hellooo?" I called out.

He didn't even twitch.

Yep. He's gotta be dead! Welp, that's the first one taken care of! Now then, what should I do? Just keep going like this? But it seems like I'll be discovered right away if the person's able to assess the situation calmly, unlike the thief. I did mix in some extra mimics, though, just to be safe.

"Um, Miss Harumi? What should I do?" Yoshio, the mimic, seemed nervous.

"Just sit still!"

You'll get found out if you move! For now, I guess I'll just wait and see.

Unfortunately, I almost immediately regretted that choice.

Boom!

Suddenly, a fierce tempest of flames blew my way.

“Gyaarrgh!” Yoshio screamed as he caught on fire.

S-So hot! What’s going on?! Is the entire passage burning up?!

“Ho ho ho ho ho! It doesn’t matter how many of you there are, I just have to burn everything away!” a grandpa, who stood at the end of the corridor, exclaimed.

Incredible flames streamed out of the staff he had pointed my way, dyeing the entire hallway in crimson and orange hues.

Crap! What a heartless old geezer, burning that thief friend of his too!

The passage was now a true burning hell. Everything around me was red-hot as a storm of fire blazed its way through.

What is this?! It’s so hot! It burns, burns! If this keeps going on, I’ll be roasted—wait, huh? It’s actually not that bad. I mean, it’s hot for sure, but like, I can kind of just...deal with it? Well then...

“Mimic Meteor!”

I kicked off the floor as hard as I could, bounced off the ceiling, and attacked the geezer from above.

“Bhhgyaarrghh!”

The corner of my treasure chest body pierced his head, which gave way under the force. He fell, and the staff left his hands. The fire finally stopped.

Of course, there wasn’t even a skeleton left of the thief-like man.

“Yoshio, I avenged you!” I cried out as I teared up.

Okay, so some people might’ve had a problem with that, but look...dead men tell no tales!

Let’s move to the next spot.

After I’d walked ahead a bit, I was suddenly overcome by a bad feeling. I turned around; I thought I saw the old geezer twitch.

No way. Absolutely no way. He’s dead, isn’t he? I totally crushed his head!

However, as I stared at him in shock, his upper body sat right up before he got back on his feet.

“Huuuh?! What?! Why?!”

“Ho ho ho ho ho, don’t think I’ll be killed so easi—”

“Mimic Missile!”

“*Bwoargh!*”

I slammed myself right into his stomach.

I crushed his head, so how is he speaking? I thought, but I quickly found out the answer.

Thanks to my tackle, I was currently on top of him. I could feel something moving, as if trying to speak, under me. Suddenly interested, I lifted the old bastard’s shirt.

It was his gut—there was a face there, just as wrinkled as the one that used to be on his head.

What is wrong with this guy?! Gross!

“Ho ho ho ho ho, it’s useless! I am Norton, the Polar Star! This will not kill me! Take this—my ultimate magic move, Meteor!”

“What?! That sounds bad! Explosive Legs!”

I stood up and kicked—well, more like stomped—the geezer’s face.

“*Drgwha!* W-Wait, Meteor takes some time to cast...”

Who’d wait in this situation?!

I swiftly made some distance.

Kaboom!

And the old weirdo exploded grandly. I hadn’t been using the skill until now because Yoshio had been here, but now that there was no one left I didn’t have to hold back.

Now then, on to the next one.

Bawoom!

Just as I was thinking about going to the next target, the dungeon started to shake heavily.

Hmm? Ahh, could that be the meteor? Wait, why'd he think a meteor from the sky would do anything in here...? What was that wrinkly old fart even trying to do? Anywaaay... I don't have anything left here, so let's get a move on.

I had one more treasure chest zone prepared, and I needed to get there quick. Just as I was looking forward to pretending to be a treasure chest again, I noticed a man in front of me.

"I-It's a pervert!"

The man, who was a bulging mass of muscle, wore nothing but a black banana hammock. He immediately started breaking every single treasure chest.

"H-Help me!" a voice cried out from among them.

"Masashiii!"

It seemed that the super-jacked man had scoped out the location where the monster—Masashi the mimic, in this case—had been placed. And just like all the other treasure chests, the muscle-bound man's powerful stomp had crushed Masashi completely.

"You fiend! First Yoshio, and now Masashi?! I won't forgive you!"

"Ohh! To think I was after a mimic with limbs!" The macho man stopped his wanton destruction of treasure chests to look at me with interest.

Dammit! This is for Masashi!

"Mimic Missile!"

I kicked off the floor into the air.

You can die vomiting blood onto the floor!

"Hrnggh!"

Thud!

Wha—?

The macho man easily caught me. Then, after flipping me upside down, he

raised me up into the air.

Wait, I can't move?!

I tried flailing around, but he had a solid grip on me and I couldn't budge an inch.

"Power Bomb!"

Ker-thud!

The macho man slammed me into the floor, keeping his grip on me the entire time.



Owwie! That seriously hurt! Crap, I'm feeling groggy. My vision is swimming... Am I okay? I'm not missing any limbs or anything, right? Anyway, my arms and legs still work. I need to crawl away somehow and get out of here—

Yoink!

As soon as that thought crossed my mind, the macho man caught me by my ankles.

“Oh ho, you're pretty tough to be able to withstand my Power Bomb. But the question now is, how long will you be able to last?”

Wurgh... Wait a second!

The macho man had a tight grip on me. He stood up and started swinging me round and round.

“Giant Swing!”

Wargh... My eyes are spinning! Round and round and round!

I stopped being able to make sense of anything. Though I was able to flail around with my hands, that didn't manage to accomplish squat.

Kaboom!

My disorientation got even worse. Now—in addition to a newfound sensation of pain and the need to hurl—I also couldn't tell my front from my back.

By the time I finally came to my senses, I realized I was a distance away from my assailant. In other words, I'd been thrown into a wall and had rolled down the corridor from the impact.

“Hm. Seems like you're a little dented. I should be able to do this.”

“Huh?”

I looked back at myself. Sure enough, I was warped. The box's frame was starting to give up the ghost. Now it seemed my lid would start flapping open even if I didn't want it to.

Wh-What the hell?! Dammit!

I'd let my guard down. Actually, I guess I wasn't strong enough to be able to

do that. Still, since all the attacks I'd taken until now hadn't affected me a single bit, I'd started believing I was invincible.

That obviously wasn't true—I'd just been facing weak enemies until now.

Okay, Harumi, calm down. I haven't lost yet! In fact, somehow I've been able to withstand this muscular psycho's attacks. It's not like I've been rendered immobile or something. Anyway, I won't be able to win just by crashing into him Mimic Missile style. He's able to react and catch me without batting a lash. If that's the case, then...!

"Mimic Meteor!"

I kicked off the floor, bounced off the ceiling, and flew at the macho man.

"Hrngh!"

He easily caught my right leg.

I expected this, though. Take this!

"Explosive Legs!"

Even if he'd managed to catch me, my kick still touched him. I'd been able to activate my Explosive Legs!

I kicked the macho man away with my left leg and managed to land magnificently on the ground. Once again, I made some distance between us.

Now it's over!

"Oh ho, so this is the rumored explosion..."

The macho man was looking at his right hand, which he'd used to catch me.

As I thought, they researched me beforehand. But he shouldn't be able to be so carefree if that's the case! There's only four seconds left! Three...two...one!

"Hrmph!"

Kaboom!

The macho man's right hand exploded.

It blew up...wait, what?!

I'd heard the *sound*, and there was a plume of smoke coming from his hand,

but that was it. He easily shook it off.

“Hrm, so this is the explosive attribute. If it’s only this strong, I should be able to keep a lid on it. I suppose I was saved by its user being so weak.”

Wh-Whaaa—?! Why’s this muscle-bound freak just fine?!

Chapter 13: The Macho Man, the Sand User, and the Young Swordsman

My explosions don't work?! Wait, I guess that macho guy isn't totally unhurt. It seems like he feels a little pain, but that's it. What should I do? Run? But even if I do that, I'll just be caught eventually.

I was in the area to the east of the entrance. It was a little place, containing only the boss room and an elevator, and it didn't connect to the other areas at all. In other words, I didn't have many options.

Plus, I couldn't just book it forever. I didn't have that kind of stamina.

So, I'd never planned to run. If I had, then I wouldn't have set this place up as the battlefield.

I was a monster, a being whose purpose was killing adventurers. My only real choice was to fight! So what if my opponent was a little strong?!

That shouldn't be enough of a reason to scare someone like me off every time!

I glared at the macho man.

He had yet to make a move, seemingly content to sit there clenching his fists and cracking his neck.

Maybe he's not attacking because he's wary of my Explosive Legs? That would mean it wasn't a total bust. He did make a grunt of effort... Wouldn't that mean that if he doesn't take measures against it, it would deal damage like normal? So I guess that means...the hit-and-run strategy it is! I just need to hit him with an Explosive Legs, then get away. Rinse and repeat. That's all. It's not a total failure—I just have to keep doing it until something happens! Awright! Let's do this!

"Mimic Pinball!" I started to ricochet all over the place by kicking off the floors, walls, and ceilings.

"Oh? I never would've imagined a mimic moving like that."

Act cocky while you still can!

I bounced off the ceiling and landed behind him. He left a small opening when he turned around, so I jumped for a wall and attacked him from the side!

“Take *this*! Explosive Legs Dropkick!”

“Reverse Horizontal Chop!”

Ker-THUD!

Once again, I was blown away into a wall. After the impact, I slumped to the floor.

The macho man had managed a counterblow while evading my dropkick. He’d sent me flying with a chop. “HAH HAH HAH! I know I can’t afford to take one of your attacks, so I just won’t!”

H-How dare you! Don’t deal with things all levelheaded when you totally seem like the type to take attacks head-on on purpose! Still, I guess it’s no good—he can even see through the speed of the Mimic Pinball. Isn’t this dude just way too strong? Agggghh, dammit! I guess this is it. This is all my power amounts to. Anyway, I oughta get away for now. Time for a strategic retreat. I’m not running away, okay?! This is all a strategy!

I crawled along, dragging myself away from the macho man.

“Hm? Over already? No, wait—you did amazing for a mimic, actually!” the macho man exclaimed as he chased after me at a leisurely pace.

Somehow, I managed to make it into a side passage. There was no place to hide, though, since it was a straight corridor.

I continued to trail down the passage. By the time the macho man arrived, I’d stopped what I was doing to face him.

Now then...

“Plan C, activate!”

I suddenly got up and ran towards him.

“You were just acting weak? As if I would let my guard down at this point—”

Sploosh!

Something green fell on top of the macho man, covering him entirely.

“Nwooaarghh! Wh-What is this?!”

“Good job, my esteemed Slatarou!”

HA HA HA HA HA!!! I thought this would happen, so I put Slatarou there!

When I realized I couldn't match him in skill, I shifted over to making him let his guard down! I retreated as if I'd been weakened and ran out of options, only to lead him here.

However, the problem now was whether or not Slatarou's attack would work.

“Gwooaarrgghh!”

Yeah, it's working. It's totally working! I guess it doesn't matter how strong you are once you're in a slime's clutches. They stick to you like glue, after all.

I was worried about his mysterious ability to defend against damage with what seemed like sheer will alone, but it looked like it wouldn't work if he couldn't see the attack coming. The surprise attack was super effective!

Tssss!

This dude is literally melting. Yeah, he's pretty much naked, after all. Of course this would be effective. I guess he might've been confident in his ability to take melee attacks, but slimes dissolve you all at once. No matter how someone trains their body, is there any way to resist that? Maybe he would've been able to survive if he'd been wearing actual armor.

“Wooarrghh! I-If only I'd been wearing cloothes!”

“Hey now!” I cried.

C'mon, man, at least stick to your guns! Wasn't that outfit—or lack thereof—some sort of personal policy or something? Anyway...

“Explosive Legs!” I kicked the slime-covered macho man.

“Mnn?! Gwofwhogh!” The macho man tried to harden himself or whatever it was, but Slatarou stuck to his face, entered his nose, and stuffed his mouth so that he couldn't breathe.

Nice assist, my dear senior Slatarou!

“Heh heh, what did you say again? ‘If only I’d been wearing clothes’? Those’ll be your last words!”

KaBOOM!

The macho man exploded. He was a pretty fierce enemy, but I still managed to win in the end!

“You really should...think about your friends a little more...” a voice called out.

“You were still up there, so I thought it’d be all right,” I replied.

Slatarou’s voice had come from the ceiling. He had a core, so as long as that survived, he wouldn’t die. That was why I had him separate only a part of his body to drop from the ceiling, instead of having him go all in. Plus, it seemed like he could control parts of himself remotely...to an extent, anyway.

“Sure, that turned out fine for me, but what about your treatment of Yoshio and Masashi?”

“No, well, ummm... Like, I kind of felt like I could hear their voices saying, ‘Do your best, Harumi! Avenge me!’”

I mean, they were monsters. I kinda figured it would be good if we all united to kill the enemy and stuff.

Slatarou sighed and said, “There are still enemies around, right? I don’t think anyone saw what just happened, but I’m not sure how many more times this plan will work.”

“I only sensed a handful of people at the entrance... I have no idea if anyone else came in afterwards, though.”

I focused on hearing and actually picked up the sound of approaching footsteps.

“Ah, someone’s here. Wanna go for plan C again?” I asked.

“Nope. That’s impossible. I used about half of myself in that fight. If I don’t rest for a while, it won’t come back. *A certain someone* blew it all up to bits!”

“Grk! That’s...fine. I’ll just go and have Slamaru help me instead.”

Slamaru was a freshly born slime, so he was in the same generation as me. Just like my senior, I'd had him wait in a passage.

Ssshhhfff, ssshhhfff.

When I tried to listen closer, I could hear the sound of something dragging against the floor. Whatever it was, it was headed my way.

Hm? What is that?

While that thought crossed my mind, the sound suddenly changed. The mystery noise's pace steadily increased.

"Huh? What? What's going on?!"

I faltered somewhat—there was no way the noises I heard could come from a human! Thanks to my hesitation, whatever it was managed to appear from around the corner.

It was sand.

"Yep. It's sand."

"It sure is."

Sure enough, a gigantic, mountain-sized pile of sand was moving by sliding across the floor. There weren't any monsters like this on the first underground floor, so I felt it was safe to assume that this had something to do with an adventurer.

Still, what the hell is that? Is there...someone inside? Seriously, what do I do with this?

I got the feeling that tackles and the like wouldn't do anything. "Well, whatever. Guess I should try kicking it for now. Explosive Legs!"

I dashed forwards and kicked the pile before quickly retreating.

This should do it...

"Ptooey!" The lump made a kinda cute spitting noise and sent some sand flying.

KaBOOM!

The silty spittle exploded midair.

Whaaa?

I ended up taking the full brunt of the shock wave, and it forced me backwards. Fortunately, I'd checked earlier if I could blow myself up using Explosive Legs, so I was fine on that front.

"He he he he he! Who cares about some explosive attribute! I just have to let go of some sand!"

I see... If that's the case...

"Explosive Leg Tornado!"

Just so you're aware, it wasn't some amazing move or anything like that—it was basically just circling round and round an enemy, kicking them all over the place.

"Wha—! Heyheyheyheyheyhey!"

Oooh, it's flustered!

"Ptooeey! Ptooeey! Ptooeey! Ptooeey!"

The mysterious adventurer hocked several globs of sand.

KABOOBOOBOOBOOBOOM!

The resultant winds from several blasts raged about me. After the tempest had continued for a while, the sand began to visibly dissipate. What was once like a massive mound was now just barely large enough to thinly coat a single human.

"O-Oh no. Ohnonononononono!" The sandy form seemed to be writhing.

Oh, it's a woman. The way the sand sticks closely to her figure is kinda lewd...

Yes, I could somehow understand what humans considered lewd.

"D-Damn you!"

Pwoomf!

The sand burst out, spreading about the area like a smokescreen.

Urgh, she's trying to blind me, huh?

Nothing could get in my eyes, but my sight could still be blocked. Thanks to that, the sand woman was easily able to disappear.

“Huh? She ran?”

“Looks like it. Well, the sand she relied on is basically all gone, so I’m pretty sure she won’t be fighting anymore,” Slatarou replied.

I concentrated on my hearing again. The sound of running came back to me, but this time it was getting farther—it *did* seem like she was escaping. After a while, I was no longer able to hear anything. Once again, the dungeon returned to silence.

“Hm? Does this mean I got all of them?”

“Maybe? We don’t know how many of them came in the first place... Anyway, any weaklings they send in will just get blown up, so wouldn’t they come in with a small elite force?”

“There sure were a lot of weirdos for an elite force...”

“They might still have something up their sleeve. Don’t let your guard down yet.”

“Well, I *did* manage to get quite a few of them already... Wait, huh?”

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s just that I seem to be healed.”

I’d been all battered and beat up thanks to that macho man. It was so bad that my lid had started to flap around freely. At some point, though, I was suddenly able to properly close it again. The warping had also vanished; I’d returned to a pristine-looking treasure chest.

“You’re right. You were in rough shape just a little while ago... Is that also thanks to those high heels?”

“I can’t think of any other reason.”

“Man, that’s amazing. I’d want a pair if I had legs.”

“Heh, I won’t be giving them to you—”

“Well, the season’s almost over. Let’s keep—hey!”

“What—”

Fwssht!

I heard a noise coming from the center of my body.

Wha—?

Something was sticking out of me—a sword, to be precise.

Yep, I had a sword stabbed deep into me from behind.

I looked around and saw a wall, but the weapon was coming out of it from the other side.

“Holy shit.”

Somehow I managed to fall forward, causing the blade to slide out of me.

I looked behind again. Nope, I hadn’t been mistaken. There really *was* a sword sticking out of the wall.

Suddenly, the wall split apart, and a figure appeared in the opening.

“No way... I’ve never heard of anyone who’s able to cut a dungeon’s walls like that...” Slatarou muttered in shock.

“I-I can’t believe it... I thought they were all weirdos...”

I was looking at the perfect image of an orthodox young swordsman.

Wait, could he be...a hero?!

Chapter 14: Conclusion

Instead of leaping into action or something like that, the young swordsman tilted his head in confusion after his dramatic entrance.

“Hmm, it’s somehow different from what I expected. A normal mimic doesn’t feel like that, and it’s different from a treasure chest too. What is it?”

Yeah. He’s totally underestimating me. Wait, this guy’s stabbed treasure chests before?! Why in the world would he do that? Actually, that doesn’t matter. Right now, the problem is that his sword completely overwhelms my defenses! If I take an attack, it’ll slice right through me like a hot knife through butter! I can’t allow myself to be careless and get too close...

“Can you do something about that, my dearest Slatarou?”

“Something...? Nope. I mean, I could sacrifice myself and charge in, but I’d just get killed for nothing. Not to mention he already knows I’m here.”

“I’m already bored of stabbing slimes... But mimics are still fun. And this is my first time seeing one with limbs,” the young swordsman said as he took a notepad and pen out of his pocket. He spoke out as he began to write. “More resistance than I expected when stabbing into it, like I was piercing something firm. Once my sword entered the chest, it slid right through, though it felt like the insides were sticking to my blade. Once it fell and my sword exited, the same sensation returned—as if something were tugging on my blade. Are its insides multilayered? It isn’t the feeling of muscle or organs. Could it be because the insides changed as I stabbed it? It has quite a bit more defense than its appearance suggests.”

Yeah, I take everything back. He’s a total weirdo! Well, anyway... If I can’t count on my stats to resist his attacks, then I’ll just have to kill him before he kills me! I remember someone saying that offense is the best defense, after all.

Luckily, I hadn’t been rendered immobile. It still hurt like a bitch when the sword went through me, though!

I can still do this. As long as I can move, my chances of winning aren't zero.
So...

“Drive-by Explosive Legs!”

I wasn't a big enough idiot to try charging in head-on. Instead, I passed beside the boy and turned around in order to kick him from behind as I escaped!

While my kicks weren't very strong, as long as they landed, I could make something explode. *I'll kick him in the sides and use him as a springboard to—*

Fwaff!

However, the boy easily deflected my leg with the flat of his sword.

Drrrrrr...

I lost my balance and went rolling thanks to my momentum.

Damn! So it didn't work. He can easily deal with that speed. Man, both the macho man and this guy are really strong. Yeah, I just don't feel like I can win! Which means... I should make like a tree and leaf. Now's my chance to run away! I'm not a fan of that plan, but there's no point in sticking with it if I can't win at all. So, off I go!

Thud!

But for some reason, I fell face-first into the floor.

All I could feel was pain, but it wasn't from my face—it was from my right leg. When I looked down at it, I saw a sword sticking out of my calf.

What? Why? I should have been far enough away. Why's he right next to me?!

“Stop moving around. It's annoying,” the boy demanded with a vexed expression.

He'd managed to close the distance between us instantly and continued to attack my leg.

It's no good. I can't find any way to win. No, maybe I could if I managed to land a kick with Explosive Legs...but I can't even imagine that happening at this point.

“Yeah, somehow the feel is different. This is fun.”

Next was a two-hit combo. I couldn't notice it in time. It was only after the boy had gone back into a waiting position with his sword that I'd realized what happened.

He'd pierced both my right and left hands instantly.

"GYAAAAARRGGHH!"

IT HURTS, DAMMIT! This guy really pisses me off!

He could kill me at any time. In fact, if he felt like it, he could easily turn me into ribbons.

But he didn't.

Instead, he was slowly, carefully checking how it felt to stab me. He was enjoying the feeling of piercing my body.

"This is fun. It takes some effort, and I like the resistance. The limbs kind of feel like a living being's. I just love the way the skin pushes back a little."

Shink!

This time it was my left thigh.

Blood trickled out. Yep, for the first time, I was bleeding. I didn't know I could do that!

"Man, this is nice. I rarely ever get the chance to stab human limbs. Oh, please don't misunderstand! I don't really think human meat is special, or anything—it's just a unique occasion. In terms of enjoyment, though, dragons are far more fun."

For some reason, the boy was talking to me. Was he treating me like a human because I had limbs?

Shink! Thunk!

He stabbed my upper arm, the back of my knee, and finally, my palm. With each thrust, he deliberately checked the sensation.

It really sunk in that he wasn't trying to torture or irritate me in any way—he was simply doing this as a *hobby*. That just made me even more angry.

Dammit! WHAT THE HELL?! MY LIMBS ARE NOT THERE FOR YOUR

ENJOYMENT! Aaargggghh, I'm so mad! I'm gonna do something to him, even if it costs me my life! I'm getting payback, dammit!

Drip!

That was when I noticed something trickle down onto me.

Tsss!

A little bit of my arm was eaten away along with that sound.

"It's you!" I cried.

At some point, Slatarou had made it above me. He was letting pieces of himself plop down on us.

"I'm thankful you came, but why not just drop all at once?" I asked.

"We've already used up almost all of plan C, so doing that wouldn't buy any time at all! I'm pretty sure I wouldn't get him even if I did that!"

I truly was grateful that he'd come to save me, but it turned out that the pieces of slime dribbling down like green rain never even reached the young swordsman.

Whoowhoowhoowhoowhhh!

He swung his sword at speeds my eyes couldn't follow, slicing apart every single droplet that fell towards him. They were finely sliced and diced before they could get even remotely close to him.

Jeez, how much of a prodigy can you be?! He wasn't even being a little serious!

"Come on, don't make me cut something so boring. You're just a slime, but I'm starting to get miffed," the young man grumbled while looking up at the ceiling.

Can I run? I'm pretty sure that's why Slatarou is doing this.

However, I knew instinctively that it would be impossible. Though he'd stopped attacking me for the moment, if I were to try to run, he'd most likely simply focus on me again.

Even while he was occupied with the rain of slime, he never took his full

attention off of me.

Slatarou's body was getting smaller and smaller. Of course, the young swordsman hadn't bothered to jump up and attack the ceiling. After all, he knew that Slatarou's barrage would eventually have to stop.

Ahh, crap. I really hate this. I'm fine with sacrificing someone else, but I really hate having someone sacrifice themselves for me.

So I put power into my legs. My wounds were already beginning to heal. The hole that had been stabbed into my body in the first attack was now completely gone.

Oh, this might work! I see. It wasn't just my imagination earlier after that fight with the macho man—I really do heal incredibly fast.

With that newfound knowledge, I decided to wait. I would use the time Slatarou was buying me to the fullest.

The young man probably thought that I was now immobile. That was why he was directing his effort towards dealing with Slatarou. And that was where my chance lay—I could surprise him by suddenly moving. Of course, I wasn't expecting a surprise attack to land. Given his skill, he would be able to react to a surprise attack. So, I just had to take that into account!

"Take this! Mimic Missile!"

Yep! As long as I was prepared to get stabbed, I could aim to take him down with me! I figured I'd be able to close the gap while his sword ran me through and hit him with an Explosive Leg kick!

Krsht!

The young man used another sword in his off hand to pierce me.

As I thought.

"Explosive Le—huh?"

However, the swordsman's blade *hadn't* run me through. He had stabbed me, sure, but the wound was shallow. The sword had stopped mere centimeters into me, and I was left floundering in the air.

In short, my kick couldn't reach him.

"Sorry, but I can control how far I stab into something."

Seriously?! How much of a genius can you be at this age?! Damn, it didn't work. I guess this is it. Ahhh, I can see the light at the end of the tunnel... Wait, why is that macho man waiting there?! Why do I have to see a jacked, half-naked weirdo at the hour of my demise?! I hate it! Why is that old mage and the sand lady coming out too?! Wait, sand? Ohhh, I see! The answer was so simple. Ah ha ha! How stupid am I?! Duh, Harumi!

"Explosive Legs! Explosive Legs! Explosive Legs!"

I kicked the air.

Why had I kicked empty space? I didn't! I was actually kicking at the small bits of my senior, Slatarou!

I slipped off of the sword and landed on the floor. Then, I tensed up and jumped all the way to the ceiling.

"Explosive Legs! Explosive Legs! Explosive Legs!"

The young swordsman probably had no idea what I was trying to do. He didn't know that my Explosive Legs could be used in this way, and that was why he was late in dealing with it.

Bo-BOOMBOOMBOOMBOOM!

Everything exploded at once. A storm of shock waves whipped up. Even if he managed to dodge one, the blasts would chain together. He was surrounded from all sides—explosive slime rained down, and the walls and ceilings themselves were bombs! There was no escape!

Shwip!

I landed and turned around. There was no trace of the young swordsman left.

Yes, I won!

I slumped to the ground, exhausted.

Oh man, I really thought I'd die this time.

I'd managed to remember the sand lady at the most critical moment. She'd

spat out sand to counter my kicks, but they'd still exploded. If that was how my explosions worked, then I knew it would be possible to chain explosions off of the slime rain!

That just goes to show that everything is worth trying. Wait, I can't afford to let my guard down yet.

I looked around. "There won't be another surprising human, will there?"

I couldn't sense anyone coming, though that wasn't much solace—I hadn't been able to sense that young swordsman until he was right next to me either.

Still, the strong adventurers really are amazing... Oh, right.

"Ptooeey!" I opened up my lid and spat something out.

"I thought I was gonna die!" Slatarou cried.

"Aww, come on. Didn't I tell you it would all work out?"

My senior was so small he was basically only his core. While I was the type to sacrifice others, I would still save them if possible. Before the explosions started, I'd managed to store him inside me.

"Hey, don't let your guard down. We don't know what's around the—"

"Marinnie here! I'm here in Lord Aldora's place to declare that season 389 is over! Good work, everyone! Everyone who survived, please wait where you are; the dungeon keeper will be coming to get you!"

"You hear that?"

And so, somehow, I managed to survive my first season.

Chapter 15: Maintenance Area

The old baldy came with his cart and put us on it. Apparently it was expected that those who could walk should make their own way back, but mimics were considered immobile.

Oh, but it wasn't like I was rendered immobile thanks to my wounds. I'd completely healed after a bit of waiting. Man, these high heels are amazing!

The old man carted us towards the elevator. It seemed that we could now move between floors, probably because the season was over.

The elevator descended while rattling and making some very disconcerting sounds. I looked around and saw several orcs, skeletons, and other monsters.

It made sense—they'd need to replace any monsters that were defeated. That was why it was better to be the reinforcements coming later, at least for the first floor.

I felt this was unfair, but the people upstairs probably didn't care much about first-floor monsters. I'd bet they wouldn't notice whether we survived or got massacred.

Either way, though, I managed to survive. In fact, as long as I don't go too far again in the future, I may be able to live in peace!

Ding!

With that noise, the elevator doors opened. The old dungeon keeper began to cart us forth.

We were treated to a view of a forest. The foliage here was creepy and ominously dense—the exact type of place you'd expect to be pounced on at any moment. That being said, I would be the predator rather than the prey!

"I wonder what floor this is?"

"Around the sixteenth. The Aldora Labyrinth proper has a total of fifteen floors, so this is the maintenance area," Slatarou explained. He was still small,

to the point that he could ride on top of my lid. “This place is separate from the main dungeon, so it’s a safe area. Adventurers can’t set foot in here.”

I see. That’s great! I can relax.

Clatter clatter, rattle rattle!

We moved on. After leaving the forest, a small castle awaited us. It felt old and formidable, with the same sense that an ambush was just waiting inside.

The castle was surrounded by small, ramshackle buildings that dotted its vicinity, forming something like a tiny town.

“You can shop there. Merchants come over from other dungeons.”

“Oh, right—you said something about points before, didn’t you?”

That’s right, I can buy stuff with points! I beat a bunch of adventurers, so maybe I can expect a pretty big haul? I bet I’m swimming in points!

However, our ride blew past the town and headed for the castle.

“I know we’re going to the castle, but what are we supposed to do there?” I asked.

“There’ll be another briefing for those who survived their first season. As for the rest, well, it’s kind of like an awards ceremony. We get points according to our results and learn how our placements change, among other things.”

Once we made it inside, the cart stopped. The interior was also dim, as if they were purposefully trying to evoke a specific atmosphere.

Thwump!

We were unceremoniously thrown from our ride. There were other carts here too, which came in one after the other. By the time I’d noticed, a sizable number of monsters had gathered in this large hall.

After some time waiting, Marinnie the arachne appeared.

“Okay, quiet down all of you! Thank you all for your efforts this season! The results this time are pretty...awesome to behold. Our relationship with the humans might’ve gone a bit south, but we made enough profit to last a couple of years! So who needs ’em?! All righty then! Veterans, make sure to go see the

accountant to get your points, got it? There're bonuses for all of you! Also, congratulations to all of you who survived your first season! We've got more explaining to do for all of you, so please wait here for a bit."

The veterans started streaming out of the hall, probably towards the accountant.

"See you then," Slatarou said.

"Yeah, see you!"

He stuck himself onto a nearby veteran's back and rode them out.

So I just have to wait here, right? This is pretty exciting!

I was totally clueless, after all. I mean, it was to the point that I *still* felt the need to ask why we had to fight adventurers in the dungeon in the first place. I'd love an explanation of things from the very beginning.

"Ah, right. Harumi!" While the anticipation was getting my (nonexistent) heart beating, Marinnie called out to me.

I wonder what she wants? Maybe she's gonna praise me for working super hard? I mean, I feel like I did really well!

"This bit won't really do anything for you, so why don't you leave?"

"Uhhh...what does that mean? You're going to be going over how the dungeon works and all that, aren't you?"

"Yeah, but it'd be meaningless for you. I don't like wasting my time."

Huh? What does that mean? Didn't I work hard? Why am I being snubbed like this?

At some point, while I was still frozen in shock, a gargoyle picked me up. I recognized him—It was the same one who'd worked so professionally on the first underground floor.

I was carried straight out of the hall.

Uhhh, wait...what? What kind of treatment is this? W-Was it actually really bad to kill all those adventurers? But she basically said that I did a good job, and that I should keep on going!

By the time I'd noticed, I was in a brightly sparkling room.

Hm? When did I get here?

A woman was waiting inside, smiling widely at me. She was like...the super soft and cuddly older sister type, I guess? She looked basically human, except for a pair of horns growing out of her head and the black tail peeking out from behind her.



“Congratulations!”

Clap, clap!

She’s...applauding me? What’s going on?

“Oh, nice to meet you. I’m Aldora, the lord of this labyrinth!”

She was somehow even more easygoing and loose than Marinnie. While Marinnie had a carefree vibe to her, there was a sharpness—like a drawn blade—hidden in her depths that sometimes showed itself. Lord Aldora had nothing like that.

“Uhhh, well...what do you need from me?”

“Weeell... Your results were a bit *too* incredible. Basically, this dungeon doesn’t have the ability to give you your rewards, a territory, or even a post! So, guess what?! You’ll be going to the EliMon Center! Wow! You’re moving up in the world!”

“What?”

For some reason, it was decided I would be going to this EliMon Center thing. Wait, what the heck is an EliMon Center?!

Amidst the din of blaring alarms, Azuratt was looking down on the fallen form of a man—Deimos, the Lion’s Blade.

“Impossible... I...”

“It’s called a Backstab. This is basically all I’m good for, though.”

As the name implied, this was a move where a knife would be stabbed into a critical point in someone’s back. That was Azuratt’s skill, and it was deadly enough to be able to bury heroes.

“If only you hadn’t taken undue interest, this wouldn’t have had to happen,” he continued.

The rumors of a strange mimic with legs had reached Deimos’s ears, and the hero had planned to sortie to take care of it.

On top of wielding three legendary items, Deimos's level was also incredibly high. No mimic, regardless of how strong they were rumored to be, could survive against such a hero, not even the rumored mimic would be able to survive.

The plan had originally been to first send in an elite extermination force, with Deimos as backup. Once George, the Severing Sword, had been defeated, though, Deimos decided to go head-on.

That was when Azuratt had attacked him from behind.

"It's about time I take my leave."

The alarms were a warning—they sounded the end of the season. The dungeon needed time to repair itself, so the adventurers needed to hurry and leave.

"Oh, right. Of course I shouldn't leave those legendary items for anyone to take."

Azuratt retrieved a sword, a helmet, and a ring from Deimos's body.

As the dungeon rebuilt itself, the bodies of adventurers left inside would be absorbed into it. Deimos's legendary items were far too high a level for a dungeon of this size, so it would upset the balance of the area even more than the rumored mimic had.

"Now then... I'm not exactly an expert on monsters, so I don't know what's happened to her, but..."

I hope she'll be able to leave.

With that expectation in his heart, Azuratt left the Aldora Labyrinth.

Part 2 *The Forest of Darkness*



Chapter 1: Briefing

I'm Harumi the mimic! I'm just a regular mimic who happened to be able to grow limbs!

How was that for an introduction? Since I was wandering down a road, I figured I'd try making one.

A big blue sky, filled with small chirping birds, spread above me. The breeze, which carried the faint scent of manure, tickled me. As you could probably guess from that description, I wasn't in the dungeon. I found myself in the sticks, some place full of farms and ranches.

Yep, I—a mimic with legs—was walking around on the surface without a care in the world. "But, hey, should that even be allowed?" I could hear a hypothetical voice ask. "There are so many problems with this scenario!"

Well, I'm sure that's how some people would react, at least. But, hey—I had a super cute girl riding on top of me, so it was all good!

Er... Sorry, it's not all good, is it? I'm sure that made no sense to you.

As for how I'd gotten myself in this situation... It all started a few days ago, during the beginning of the Aldora Labyrinth's off-season. Let's flashback!

"EliMon...?"

I was completely caught by surprise when I was told to go to some EliMon Center. So surprised, in fact, that the dazzling brightness of Lord Aldora's room didn't compare.

Well, that's how I *felt*, anyway. It wasn't like I had a face to show it.

"Yes, for elite monsters. You know, like the Three Dragon Knights, or the Four Heavenly Kings, or the Multitude of Five, or Section Six, or the Seven Noble Leaders, or the Gathering of the Ten Greats, or the Twelve Demon Generals, or the Seventy-Two Pillars, or the Hundred and Eight Stars. You'll become a

candidate for a position like that!” Lord Aldora exclaimed.

She seemed like a super fluffy and soft type of character at a glance, but her swinging tail just *barely* made you realize she was actually a monster.

“But how great and strong are those people, really...?” I mumbled.

I really wanted to tell her to keep her examples concise. Plus, wouldn’t a multitude of five just be five regular people? And I thought the list would go through all the numbers, but she just started skipping around!

However, there was no way I could’ve said that to my boss.

“Anyway, we’ve always had a recommendation slot for EliMon open, but there was no one to give it to...up till now, anyway. I just thought maybe you could make it, Harumi. Oh, let me guess—maybe you’re thinking that you’re getting the short end of the stick? Like we’re just trying to get rid of you or something?”

“Not really, no. But I have no idea what anything you’re talking about means. I don’t even know why I was born.”

“‘Why you were born’? Not even I know the answer to a philosophical question like that,” she replied with a laugh.

Well, of course she wouldn’t.

Still, *someone* had created me. Wouldn’t that mean I’d been made with a purpose in mind?

“Ahh, is this about Marinnie’s whole explanation thing?”

Just in case some people might’ve forgotten—Marinnie, the arachne, was this place’s tenth-underground-floor boss.

I’d been promised an explanation if I survived my first season; when the time came, though, I was suddenly excluded, thrown out, and brought here instead.

“Yes. I was looking forward to it, but then she told me that it’d be meaningless. It was kind of a shock.”

Still, I could see what she was talking about now. She was saying that, since I was going to be leaving the dungeon, there wouldn’t be any point.

Wait, then is she implying that she doesn't want me to come back?

"Contrary to appearances, Marinnie's pretty high-strung and fussy. I don't see the harm in letting you sit in, but oh well. I can just be the one to tell you!"

"Really?!"

"How about starting with what we, as monsters, are?"

"Ohhh, that's exactly what I wanted to know! Basic stuff like that!"

"We're beings who tease and play around with humans. Basically, we're in a permanent skirmish with them!"

"What?"

Huh? Why's this so different from what I was expecting? I kinda thought the answer would be like, "We need to pluck out the humans from their roots, mwa ha ha!" or something like that...

"Fundamentally, we're a group of anti-human existences! Sure, we and the humans might fight and kill each other, but neither of us want to completely eradicate the other. It's like...how should I put it? We're close enough to get into fights at the drop of a hat, I guess? Like, it'd be pretty boring if we lost our only enemy...or something like that?"

"Do...the humans know that?"

"I don't think they do. Well, to them, dungeons are a fountain of resources. In the end, their attitude's still about the same as ours. Their god despises monsters, though. Oh, don't misunderstand—it's fine for you guys to slaughter them with everything you've got. Those up above—like the demon lord—do their best to place us so humans won't die out, so we don't have to worry about anything like that."

I see. So Lord Aldora's also on the lower end of the totem pole, and the demon lord's on top.

"Then, what are dungeons?" I asked.

"A defensive monster base. Though, in reality, it's more like a human harvesting machine. The dungeon gathers the souls and spirits of humans that die within it. Oh, do you know what souls and spirits are?"

Apparently every living thing, be it human, monster, or something else, had a soul and a spirit. As long as you were living and moving, you had one—also, “living” included the undead in this case. So, when someone died, their soul and their spirit scattered into the atmosphere.

The two words kind of meant the same thing, but they also differed in ways.

Souls were something like a fuel source that kept living creatures moving. It didn't matter what sort of creature it came out of, it was treated purely as a source of energy. Apparently both humans and monsters got stronger by absorbing bits of their victim's soul.

On the other hand, spirits were something like the root of an existence. It was also like a reflection of one's personality and uniqueness.

At least, that was how Lord Aldora explained it. Somehow, I managed to wrap my head around it.

“When something dies in the dungeon, most of that thing's soul and spirit are absorbed by the place itself. That's why it's so hard to level up inside one.”

“I see... I *did* feel like it was hard to level up...so it was because the dungeon was skimming off my kills.”

Oh, shit. I just blamed the dungeon for leeching off my exp. Will I be all right?

I glanced at Lord Aldora. It looked like I was safe. I guess she wasn't the type to get offended by comments like that.

“That's right. But in exchange for that, monsters are compensated with points. And we use the souls and spirits gathered this way to pay a stronger organization who controls even more land than we do.”

“Wow, tough world...”

“But this season, we managed to get the spirit and soul of a hero! I'm just over the moon!”

“Huh? Hero? Who was it?”

The last guy I'd fought in the season had been really strong, but had he really been a hero? True, he'd managed to beat me up really easily, but it seemed to me that heroes should've been even stronger than that!

“Ah, for some reason there was just a dead one on the first floor. That’s why he wasn’t counted as your kill, Harumi,” she explained apologetically.

“Oh, that’s fine. I don’t plan on trying to claim credit for someone that kicked the bucket on their own.”

What she said made sense, despite her appeasing tone—I wasn’t the one that had killed him, after all.

“Anyway, back to dungeons—we set the difficulty so that humans’ll want to come back, even though a fair number of them always die. So we take their souls and spirits and make more monsters. Then, we have those monsters continue killing adventurers. It’s a cycle.”

“Huh? Does that mean I was made from a human spirit?”

“Well...it feels rude to say this, but for weaker monsters—like the ones we place on the first floor—we just mix together a bunch of leftover bits willy-nilly. So you don’t really have a base or a past as someone else.”

Leftovers...

W-Well, that’s still fine. It’s not like I was totally shocked by the truth, or anything!

Still, I felt like my personality and point of view was pretty close to a human’s, so I was willing to bet that a large part of what had been mixed into me was human.

“That’s pretty much it when it comes to dungeons. Do you have any questions?”

“I get it for the most part. So, where’s the EliMon Center?”

“It’s far north, on the demon continent across an ocean. It’s a monster paradise—there aren’t any humans living there.”

“Uhhh, that sounds really far...”

The moment she’d mentioned an ocean only cemented the fact that it was a huge distance away. I was still thinking it would all work out somehow, though.

“It is—”

“Oh, that reminds me. A senior of mine, Slatarou, mentioned that monsters can warp between dungeons. Will I be doing something like that to get over there instantly?”

That was how I’d heard the merchants were getting to and from this dungeon, at least. If I could use that, I could get there in a flash!

“There *is* a warp fountain which you can use if you pay enough souls, but you’re forbidden from using it, Harumi.”

Whaaaat?! I thought, but of course I bit my tongue. My displeasure still seemed to be written on my nonexistent face anyway.

“Your level’s too low. You need to train a little more to be able to use it. So I was wondering if you could just get there by foot. You can train and raise your level while you’re at it...”

“Uhh, but I thought I was being recommended for that EliMon place because I’m strong?”

“You are! But right now, that’s only thanks to your item, right? I don’t think that’ll fly in the EliMon Center.”

“Umm, I’m not really happy about this, but I *did* suggest giving it to someone with a higher level...”

I brought up the idea again because walking all the way to another continent sounded like way too much work. The results I’d put out were entirely thanks to my legendary item, the Crimson Rose high heels. That meant anyone could use them to do the same.

“Well, let’s see... Would you mind lending them to me?”

“Here.”

I did as I was told. I took off the heels and gave them to Lord Aldora. Even if she’d demanded that I hand them over, I wasn’t exactly in a position to refuse.

Lord Aldora took off her right shoe and tried it on.

Oohh, it really does look good on someone with an actual human body shape.

Pwomf!

With a flashy noise, her right ankle exploded.

What?! Why?!

I was sent into a panic as the Crimson Rose heels landed in front of me.

“See? If the legs aren’t beautiful enough, the shoes won’t allow you to wear them!”

“That’s terrifying! That damn thief—what the hell did he make me wear?!”

“That’s why we’re recommending you. You’re good enough because you’re able to wear those shoes. But that’s still not quite enough, so I was hoping you’d try to raise your level more.”

While she was talking, Lord Aldora’s foot regenerated. She quickly put her shoes back on.

Man, she really is amazing. She could’ve just explained the whole thing to me, but she went out of her way to demonstrate it.

“But will I really be fine on the surface? I don’t really have anything to compare myself to.”

“Well, there aren’t any invasion-type monster bases around here, so the surface is pretty much entirely ruled by humans. If a monster were to just walk around all nonchalantly up there, it’d definitely kick up a fuss.”

“Uhh, isn’t that...bad?”

An entire civilization of humans versus a single monster—who would win? Even though I could use my explosions effectively, I refused to underestimate a horde of adventurers. As long as they knew about my powers, they’d be able to create a plan to counter that.

“That’s why I’m going to assign an underling to you! Come here!”

Beckoned over by Lord Aldora’s call, someone came over from a corner of the room.

It was a girl wearing very cute clothes. She didn’t have any wings, tail, or horns, so she looked like a normal human.

What’s going on here?

“This is Pekora—Peko—the coppélia. She’s a puppet-type monster, which is kind of like a golem. She’s categorized as an inorganic, so she’ll be able to talk to you. I was thinking that if you have her act as a monster tamer, you’ll be able to travel above ground no problem!”

Ahhh, yeah...

I had the distinct feeling that her plan wouldn’t work out at all, but Lord Aldora seemed very enthused about her idea. As a lowly underling, I couldn’t really object.

Chapter 2: Shopping

With everything settled, I left Lord Aldora's room.

I'd be leaving at the start of the next season, so for the two days the dungeon took to repair itself, I was free.

But I couldn't afford to just laze around! I needed to prepare for the journey. After all, I'd be traveling amongst humans. I probably needed to plan ahead for every possibility.

I looked beside me. Pekora, the coppélia, was sitting there. She was going to be my underling. She looked like a cute girl in adorable clothes, but apparently she was a doll.

So she's like a ball-jointed doll? I can kinda see the joints. It also seemed like she could open and close her mouth, so there must have been musculature there too. *She doesn't pass as human at all! It's so obvious as soon as you get close to her!*

So I needed to think of a way to be able to disguise her. Just another bit of homework to add to the pile.

Urggh, I'm getting worried about the future...

"Who do you think you're looking at?"

As I was staring at Pekora and wondering what to do, she spoke up.

"Oh, sorry. I was just thinking about how I'd be able to disguise you."

"Huh? Don't get so familiar with me."

"What?"

"You're just a weakling. Don't get so full of yourself."

Krshh, thud!

I fell on my behind.

I was so taken aback that, for a moment, I couldn't process what happened.

I'd actually been kicked by Pekora and lost my balance.

"I have no idea what Lord Aldora is thinking, sending a mimic who just happened to get their hands on a legendary item to EliMon."

"What? Uhh..."

"How dare *you*, a piece of level 15 trash, talk to *me*? I'm level 128, for goodness' sake," Pekora said coldly before quickly disappearing somewhere.

Uhhh...wasn't she supposed to be working under me? What's with her attitude? Ahhh, yeah...so I guess that's happening. That won't slide with me. I'm no wimp—I'll show her who's on top! I'm gonna kill her! It's payback time! Wait, where did she go?

I couldn't see her anywhere.

Well, even if she's pissed off with the arrangement, an order's still an order. Lord Aldora commanded it. Pekora'll probably show up when it's time to leave, at least. She will, right...? Anyway...

I regrouped from that blow and started walking through the castle towards the accountant. I was going to get my points.

I found a random inorganic monster to direct me and managed to reach the accountant safely.

I saw a service window, so I tried walking up to it.

"Good evening!"

To explain—the season always ended at midnight on the last day, so it was still late at night. Well, to be fair, this place was a little ridiculous. I mean, even though we were underground, there was a sky with a moon in here. Who's to say it really was nighttime?

"Hellooo, are you here for points? I suppose you're new," a wriggly sort of woman with snakes for hair replied.

"Yes. My debriefing dragged on pretty long."

"Okay then, first you need to install the Wallet plug-in."

I did, and a pop-up appeared in front of my eyes.

Installing Wallet plug-in. Y/N?

There was a yes and a no button, as well as a help window to explain what it was.

“So should I just choose ‘yes’ here?”

“Indeed, but be careful—while you don’t have to worry about it this time, you should make a habit of checking the provider when you install plug-ins. Make sure you know whose control it’s under.”

True, but there’s no point in suspecting this one.

I opted for the yes button. These pop-up windows were controlled by the mind, so you could operate them by just thinking about what you wanted to do.

I waited while it was installed. It finished without consequence.

A small zero was now displayed in the upper corner of my status window, so I figured it worked out fine.

“All right then, I’ll deposit the point—” The receptionist did a spit take.

Splat!

Large globs of saliva—both from her human mouth and all the snakes’—splashed onto me.

Ewww!

“A million?! *A million?! What?! Wait just a second, please!*” the lady shouted in a panic before retreating to a back room.

I didn’t know the market value of a point, but that amount must’ve been really strange.

I waited a little while, but she came back quickly.

“I received confirmation; it seems there was no mistake. I’ll be depositing the amount into your account then.”

Accounting requests to deposit 1,000,000 points into your account. Accept?

I wasn't enough of a cynical joker to try selecting "no" here. That was my long roundabout way of saying I accepted. Once I did, suddenly the zero gained a bunch of friends, and a one was added all the way to the left.

Ooohh, my first paycheck! Awesome!

"Sorry. This is the first time I've ever seen anyone earn a million points in a single season, and you're new, on top of that. I was surprised, to say the least."

"How much would be normal?"

"I think you'd be doing well at around a thousand."

I see. Well, I did get a lot of them, so this might be correct.

"I can go shopping with these points, right?"

"Yes, you can. Trades between monsters are done with these points."

"Thanks!"

Then let's go shopping!

The castle's surroundings were lively, even at night. Actually, I wasn't sure how this place worked—maybe it was always night here, since the moon hadn't moved from the position it was in since I'd first gotten here.

Well, I guess that doesn't really matter. Anyway, what should I buy...actually, what're they selling?

With that question in mind, I started going into nearby stores.

"Good evening. What do you sell?"

"What? Come on, figure that out before coming in here!" a brain, who was suspended in a jar full of liquid, shot back in exasperation.

There wasn't anything that stood out in the store, and the brain jar had just been placed boldly on top of the counter.

“Fine. This place sells skills and plug-ins,” the vendor replied.

“Oohh! Then do you sell the one that tells me the time?”

“Of course. If you want something like that, you must be new.”

“Yeah. I’d like the plug-in. Here you go.”

I was told it was a hundred points, so I immediately installed it. Once I did, a small clock popped up on top of my status window.

10384/5/13 03:44:43

That was how it looked. One year was 365 days, which were split into twelve months. One day was twenty-four hours long, and an hour was sixty minutes long. I have no idea why it was split like that, though!

“Are there any other good plug-ins?” I asked.

“Hmm, I suppose these would be the most popular.”

I ended up buying whatever he recommended.

- **Targeting**
- **Level Display** (Appraisal skill required)
- **Scales**
- **Class Change**
- **Subtitles** (Language skill required)
- **Item Shortcut**
- **Calculator**
- **Date and Time**
- **Alarm**
- **Timer**
- **Counter**
- **Map**
- **Automap**
- **Drawing Pad**
- **Word Processor**

- Encryption
- Camera
- Sound Recorder
- Video Recorder
- Schedule
- Route Wayfinder
- File Transfer
- File System

This should be enough. Honestly, I probably don't need all of this, but I might as well.

All that cost me a hundred thousand points!

Huh...? That used up a lot, didn't it? Am I being ripped off?

"Wow. I was expecting you to complain and say that you didn't need all this at some point, but you went and bought all of them..." the brain replied.

"It's fine, isn't it? They might prove useful at some point, after all."

"If you're fine with it, then whatever. Anyway, want any skills?"

"Oh, right. I can buy skills too! Let's see...do you have any Language skills? I'd like to talk to humans."

The surface was ruled by humans, so if I was going to be traveling over land, then I figured I might need to know their language. With just the skills I had at the moment, I might've been able to understand what they were saying, but I wouldn't be able to talk back.

Oh, by the way, a breakdown of how Language skills worked: Base: The ability to understand the language when spoken to you.

+1: The ability to speak the language.

+2: The ability to use the language, even without the necessary body parts or organs. Your voice would just come out from somewhere.

That meant, in my case, I needed a +2.

"We have all kinds of languages, so of course we have Human. Getting a

single species to +2 costs five thousand points.”

“I see, so that’s how it is. Then give me all of them!”

“All...wait, *all*?! How many points do you have?! That’ll be...three hundred thousand points.”

“Whoa, that’s a *lot*! Wait, does that mean there are actually sixty species’ worth of languages?”

“No. We only stock five—enough to cover all the major ones.”

“Then why? It should cost twenty-five thousand at most, right?”

“Well here’s the thing: stacking the same type of skill over and over makes the next one more expensive.”

“Why?!”

“The same types of skills all take up identical space in your storage. The more you try to pack in, the harder it is and the more it costs. Just call it a technical fee of sorts.”

“Fine. Gimme.”

“You’re still buying it?!”

Yeah, I’m pretty sure Language skills are important. There’s a lot of places to use them.

So I ended up buying all five Languages. My skill entry looked like this:

Languages (Inorganics +2, Human +2, Dead +2, Abhuman +2, Beast +2)

“Then next, I want—”

“Wait just a second!”

“What?”

“You’re buying way too much! It’s partially my fault for letting it slide, but...!”

“Really?”

Oh, he really was just letting it slide...

"Look."

Something appeared in front of me.

Hm?

Would you like to accept a file from Brallin?

I tried accepting it, and a map of the town unfolded before me. There was a marker placed on it.

Wow, the file transfer and map plug-ins are coming in handy already.

"Go there. You'll find an old biddy who'll teach you a lot. She'll get you what you need."

I see. Then let's go!

Chapter 3: Exposition

I went to the building that had been pointed out to me by the skill shop guy and was greeted by a fuzzy...thing. Like, it was literally a human-sized ball of fur. It was also tottering and seemed rather unsteady.

Just like a grandma...well, it's not like I know what's going on inside there, though.

"Hello!" I called out.

"I heard already. You want advice, yes?"

"Oohh, exactly! That makes things quick!"

"So, what is your goal for the moment?" the fuzzball asked.

I gave her a rough outline of everything that had happened to me up until now, as well as what I was going to have to go through in the near future.

"I see. So you require things that would be useful for a journey, as well as things that would strengthen you in combat."

"Yep, that's about right."

"First, you should not need anything in the realm of weapons or armor—those shoes ought to serve you just fine."

"You're right about that too. I'm pretty sure there wouldn't be many weapons as good as this just lying around."

Not to mention the fact that it also raised my defenses, speed, and even recovery rate. In terms of equipment, there was no doubt that these babies were pulling off the work of an entire outfit.

"But there are still items you need—equipment that increases your ability to absorb souls. You should aim to get something like that, even if it takes the rest of your points."

"What is it?"

“Some believe that if you fight on the surface, you will be able to absorb more than you would in a dungeon... That is a very simple thought process, and it is completely wrong. You can absorb souls from the dead, but they scatter and dissipate quickly. It is not easy by any means. Also, if there is anyone else in the vicinity, they will compete with you for the power of the soul. That is why you need to increase your ability in this field. With something that helps you absorb more souls, you will be able to get much more than you normally would. Use the rest of your points to buy a ring with as high an absorption buff as you can. Luckily, you have two hands free—you should be able to wear two rings.”

Though I had five fingers on each hand, apparently each hand could only gain the effect of one ring.

Still, just having arms and legs to equip things with is a huge advantage, isn't it?

“That should do for equipment. As for skills...that will have to wait until you raise your level a little further. You have already filled your scant skill slots with Language skills, after all...”

“Huh? Wait, would it actually have cost less points if I'd leveled up first?”

“That is correct. You forced extra skills in, so it cost you more points.”

I couldn't help but sigh. “I really need to learn more about these things...”

“At least your new Language skills will not be useless. There will be many instances where negotiation will be necessary. However, you will want an Appraisal-type skill. Once your level goes up, get one.”

“Which means I just need those items, right?”

“Indeed. Lucky for you, you have an advantage—you can store items. You are a treasure chest, after all. Your ability to stow objects should expand as you level up as well.”

So I'd managed to learn what item I'd need for my journey.

Anyway, just who—or what—is this old lady?

“Just a nosy old grandma. One who grieves over the fact that monsters are made to be used and tossed aside like pawns.”

Sure.

All righty, it's time to go.

After shopping for a bunch of items, my stats now looked like this:

Name: Harumi

Race: Mimic

Gender: Female

Level: 15

Gift: The Beautiful Die Young

Divine Protection: None

Skills: Mimic (Treasure Chest, Treasure Chest remodeled), Languages (Inorganics +2, Human +2, Dead +2, Abhuman +2, Beast +2), Storage, Explosive Legs (*Only when equipped with Crimson Rose)

Equipped Items: Right hand: Ring of the Greedy (Soul Absorption rate: 500%), Left Hand: Ring of the Greedy (Soul Absorption rate: 500%), Feet: Crimson Rose

On top of my equipment, I'd also bought food, recovery items, and a whole bunch of other stuff that seemed like it would be useful!

Yep, it turned out I needed food! Apparently, I'd get energy from the dungeon itself any time I was in it. That meant I needed to eat when I went up to the surface.

As an inorganic being, my sustenance consisted of ores, minerals, and gems. After some testing, I'd found out that gems were the tastiest, so that's what I'd bought.

Right now, I was on the surface, just outside of an alternate exit to the dungeon. This one was located in the wilderness, and it was far away from the

main entrance. None of the humans knew about it.

“Is she seriously a no-show...?”

Pekora, the coppélia, had yet to show up. I’d climbed up onto a nearby rock to look around for her. There wasn’t a soul around.

Instead, I noticed a deep crater that looked rather new.

Oh, wait—that must be from the meteor that one mage cast. So this is where it hit. Oh man, that’s scary! I bet I would’ve bit the dust instantly if it’d hit me directly!

While I was distracted by thoughts of the crater, I felt someone coming up behind me. I turned around.

Pekora was finally here.

“What? Why’re you just spacing out here?” she asked.

“I wasn’t. Anyway, let’s get right to it. So here’s the plan: Lord Aldora said that we should pretend that you’re a monster tamer...but I figured we don’t actually have to stick to that. I prepared this instead.”

I pointed to a pull cart with women’s clothes in it.

“I’ll just pretend to be a treasure chest and sit on the cart. If you pull it, you’ll just be someone moving luggage, won’t you? There’s no need to arouse people’s suspicions with a walking treasure chest this way. Also, those clothes are long-sleeved, so they’ll be able to hide your joints. I also got you a shawl to wrap around your neck and a wide-brimmed hat. Once you wear those, I’m pretty sure you’ll be able to pass as human.”

“No.”

“What?”

“Why do I have to do your dirty work? How idiotic. You’re just a monster meant to be used like a rag by me. That’s all it is.”

“What? No! No way! You’re *my* subordinate here!”

“Me, an elite being created with a fourth of a golden dragon’s spirit, become *your* subordinate? You, some piece of trash made with leftover spirits? Don’t

joke.”

With that, Pekora started walking.

Sigh...

I’d wondered if, even if it was unwillingly, she would obey me as her boss. Unfortunately, it looked like she had absolutely no intention of that.

Then there’s no need for me to treat her as a subordinate, is there?! As if I’d call you that cutesy “Pekora” nickname! You’re just Peko from now on!

Peko was moving on ahead, so I followed her, leaving a little bit of space between us.

Our first destination was the Forest of Darkness. It was another defensive monster base, which was apparently run by an acquaintance of Lord Aldora’s. Once we made it there, there would no longer be a need to sneak around.

We continued to walk through the wilderness. Of course, we did so in total silence.

Seriously, though, I have no idea what Peko’s thinking. This is an order from Lord Aldora. What’s she trying to accomplish by copping this attitude? Should I ask? No, I probably wouldn’t get an answer.

We made it out of the wilderness and into some farmland. I felt nervous, since it wouldn’t be strange if we started seeing some humans, but Peko simply proceeded straight ahead like she didn’t have a single thought going through her tiny head.

While I was worrying about whether or not we should keep going like this, I spotted a group of humans on the road ahead.

What are they? Bandits on the way back from a job?

They were all armed differently and stained with blood. They bragged to each other about their accomplishments in battle while dragging a line of humans bound together with chains. Well, at the very least, they definitely weren’t on the up and up.

“What do we do?” I asked Peko after walking up to her.

“Humans are the enemy, so of course we destroy them all.”

Huh, I wasn’t actually completely ignored.

“I see... Well, I agree. All righty then, Explosive Legs!”

Thunk!

I kicked Peko out of nowhere.

“Wha—?!”

Being kicked from behind must’ve been a first for her. She might’ve been level 128, but she still lost her balance.

“Well, I hope you’ll at least do your first—and last—job as my subordinate properly. Anyway... Mimic Missile!”

With that, I tackled her!

Peko went flying into the group of bandits.

KaBOOOOM!

Peko exploded. A little later, the group of bandits followed suit, blowing up violently in a chain.

Oh right, I shouldn’t just be watching nonchalantly like this. In order to absorb souls, I need to get as close as I can.

I hurried into the midst of the explosions.

Ohhh, I can feel it! It’s coming! Just what I’d expect from a total 1000 percent extra soul absorption! I can feel my level rising all at once! Whoops, I can’t just be distracted by souls.

I opened my lid and took an item out from inside with my tongue.

“Spirit Catcher!”

It looked like a regular old scientific flask, but it was actually an item that could capture spirits. Thanks to that, I proceeded to snag all I could. I just needed to toss a few of them out, and they’d capture the escaping spirits for me. All I had to do was use storage on them later.

Yep. Good haul!

One flask in particular shone brightly.

I wonder if this is Peko's spirit?

I picked it up and looked at it. I could see something wriggling around inside.

“Imagine the two of us traveling together. Just me and you—the stuck-up doll, full of unwarranted pride in your ‘elite’ origins—on the road together. Sure, we’d clash at first, but eventually we’d manage to build a strong bond. And then maybe we’d even become friends... Yeah, right! As if that would ever happen!”

I mean, it'd be totally impossible. Like, it'd be way too much trouble. Why would I have to go out of my way to accomplish that?

Useless underlings should be thrown away! That was my—Harumi's—style! After all, weren't dungeons already being run like that? I was treated like a throwaway pawn at first too.

The world of monsters was one of survival of the fittest! The prissy little doll with me was probably drowning in that ideology, so she'd been far too naive.

“Well, it's still up in the air whether it was okay to finish off the subordinate I was assigned...but we can just chalk it up to an unfortunate accident!”

Oopsies! But, hey, it's not like Lord Aldora would know what happens on the surface!

Chapter 4: Side Story *Aldora Labyrinth, Maintenance Area*

“But I’m toootally watching youuu!” Lord Aldora exclaimed.

“What’re you doing, Harumi...?”

Lord Aldora sat on her luxurious sofa in her room, which was located in the maintenance area of the Aldora Labyrinth. There was a crystal ball standing on the table in front of her.

Marinnie, the arachne, was also there, but she was sitting on the floor across from her. They were both looking into the crystal ball, which currently displayed Harumi’s exploits.

“Hmmm, Pekora was a good kid, though. Maybe there was a misunderstanding somewhere? I should’ve told her to help Harumi out...” Lord Aldora mumbled.

“Isn’t that an impossible request? I’m just going off my gut feeling here, but I could sense a certain mettle in her, like she was going to get into the EliMon Center instead.”

“Well, to be honest, if I was going to recommend someone, it would’ve been Pekora. I just wanted her to think she wasn’t chosen in the end.”

“You *did* tell her to play subordinate to a level 15 monster from the first floor. Wouldn’t she have figured it out...?”

“I didn’t mean anything by it, though.”

“So, what do we do? About Harumi, I mean.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Isn’t this a bit of a, like, problem? On paper, Pekora was her subordinate. There might’ve been some situation where Harumi would need to sacrifice her, but that totally wasn’t the case here! Wasn’t this just Harumi killing her out of

spite or something? At least, that's how they might see it."

"Yeahhh... As a member of an organization, this would be a problem, wouldn't it? But those who want to go to EliMon probably don't have to worry about things like that. It's fine to let them act as they please. That's my opinion, anyway."

"If that's what you think, then..."

As they talked, the image of Harumi on the crystal ball suddenly disappeared. Pekora had been sent (without her knowledge) to observe the mimic and relay the images. Harumi had put the flask with Pekora's spirit into storage.

"What now? We can't watch over Harumi anymore," Marinnie said.

"Hmmm... It's a bit worrying to just leave her to her own devices like this, isn't it?"

Lord Aldora snapped her fingers. When she did, a black shadow, vaguely human-shaped but incredibly flat, appeared beside Marinnie.

"You called, Lord Aldora?" the black *something* asked.

"There's a child named Harumi, you see. She's heading to the EliMon Center, and her watcher is gone now. Could you go take the watcher's place?"

"Understood." The shadow immediately disappeared.

"Uhhh, that was...?" Marinnie seemed perplexed.

"I guess I'd consider him a friend from the great war? He comes over every once in a while, so I just use him when I can."

"That shouldn't be how you treat a friend, though..."

"It's a little dodgy leaving Harumi by herself, sooo..."

It shouldn't have been difficult to reach the EliMon Center in good time. All someone had to do was avoid anything unnecessary, or any needless conflict. However, the "someone" in this case was Harumi, and Marinnie felt doubtful that the mimic would do that.

"Oh, right," Marinnie spoke up. "I received a summons from the Aldora Labyrinth council. I'm planning to report that we chased Harumi out, since it's

technically true. Could we also return their silver-ranked adventurers' spirits?"

She figured that she should bring gifts to the council since she was going to meet them anyway.

"Good idea. We've made more than enough with the hero anyway, so why not return them?"

"So...that means Mackenzie, the Dirty Thief; George, the Severing Sword; Norton, the Polar Star; and Holcomb, the Lightly Armored, correct? There's a possibility they'll go off to mess with Harumi if they're resurrected, though."

"That's fine, isn't it? Harumi needs to grow a lot more, after all!" Lord Aldora said cheerfully.

It seemed that Harumi was in for a stormy future.

Chapter 5: More Mimicry

“She said she was made with a quarter of a golden dragon, didn’t she? I wonder if I’ll get stronger if I eat this?”

The moment I said that, the flask containing Peko’s spirit suddenly started shaking and struggling vehemently. Wait, could she understand me in there?

Well, apparently doing things with spirits needs a specialized facility, so I shouldn’t do anything stupid here. So, I put Peko’s flask in storage for the time being.

Now then, what’s my level...ooohh! I’m already at 100! Good job, Peko! You really were level 128. Your exp was delicious! I ended up leveling a bunch already, so what should I do for the rest of this trip?

The way I saw it, there were two basic paths to choose from.

The first was an all-out murder spree. I’d just kill every single human I happened upon from now on. It’d be fine if everyone was like the bandit group just now, but I couldn’t afford to underestimate humans. I was all too aware that there were adventurers with incredible abilities.

The second path was to attempt to disguise myself somehow. Since Peko had exploded into smithereens, I couldn’t pretend to be a tamed monster anymore. I still had an idea, though.

I was a mimic, a monster specialized in pretending to be something else. Now that my level had gone up, I could expect my mimicry level to go up as well.

You could buy skills with points, but they could also be gained—or even strengthened—through use or leveling up.

So I checked my status once again.

There it is.

Sure enough, I had an extra ? in my Mimicry list. That meant there was another form I could change into.

Right now I'm a treasure chest with legs, and this form is called "Treasure Chest remodeled." Wouldn't that mean I could gain a human form next? That just seems natural, right?

I wanted to try turning into this new form right away, but I was worried about doing it in the middle of a bloodstained road as if I didn't have a care in the world.

What should I do?

I looked around and found two nearby places I could use.

The first was the village that the bandits had probably attacked. The other was a forested area. Neither was too far away.

Hmmm, let's go to the forest first.

The bandits earlier weren't much of a threat, but why go to a place filled with humans on purpose?

Okay, I still need to store all the Spirit Catcher flasks before I leave.

I gathered all the flasks into one spot, scooped them all up with my tongue, and threw them inside me.

With the cleanup all done, I headed for the forest.

I managed to reach it easily after a short stroll, but I decided to walk in a little deeper. I didn't want to get found easily.

Clap, clap, clap, clap.

This should do it.

I looked all around me. The forest was dense and somewhat dim. There were no signs of humans or monsters nearby. I didn't have any detection skills though, so I couldn't be sure. At least, it *looked* like I was alone.

I should be alone, sooo...let's get to it.

"Human! Become humaaaaaannn! Woooarrgghhh!" I shouted, channeling my energy as best I could.

Oh, I felt an itch! I'm changing! I think I can do it, okay!

“Raaaaagghh!” I shouted harder.

Then...

Bwoooooop!

Something stretched.

Hm? Did something change?

I changed my viewpoint to get a better look at myself. Unfortunately, nothing had changed. I was still a treasure chest, and my limbs...wait, what?

Wait, aren't I...taller?

I moved my point of view to check myself from all sides.

I now had a butt and a belly button.

Uhhhhh...

Basically, I now had a complete woman's lower half coming out of the bottom of my treasure chest. While my legs used to be connected from the thighs down, now I had the lower half of a human torso. The connection was just above the belly button.

This is...uhhh...

I checked my status window. The new entry stated,

“Treasure Chest remodeled 2.”

Well, I'd gotten closer to being a full human, that much was true, but there was no way I could pass as one. I'd just ended up increasing my creep factor.

Just a little more. I need an upper half. Yeah, if I had that, I'd be able to work something out!

“Drraagghhh! Upper half! Give me an upper haaalf!” I tried putting in even more effort and will into transformation.

Nope, I didn't have any idea about how this whole mimicry thing worked! I was just doing my best to influence the ability to produce the body I wanted. I

felt like my only choice was to push through using my burning desire!

Suddenly, I started having an itchy, uncomfortable feeling.

Is it happening? Did I do it?!

“Hwwaaagghh!” I didn’t know why, but I raised another shout.

Pa-clack!

The lid of my treasure chest popped open, and I fell over grandly.

Huh? What happened?

I’d fallen sideways. My vision had been tilted ninety degrees, so that the trees looked horizontal to me.

I should’ve been able to keep my vision steady no matter what, so discovering that it could be dragged along with my body was a new discovery.

Hwup.

I tried to right my vision, only to realize I couldn’t.

Huh?

I moved my hands to touch my body.

Hm? A body?

I moved them up farther.

Pat, pat!* *Pwomf, pwomf!

Soft. And I have a neck too. And cheeks. And hair! Ohhh, did I succeed?! I have a whole body now!

Nope, I didn’t.

Uhhh...

To put it simply, I looked like a girl who was about to be eaten by a treasure chest. At least, I...think I did?

So I had a girl’s upper half growing out from inside the treasure chest, and I’d lost my legs in the process. I’d also lost the arms growing from the sides of the chest; they were now attached to my torso.



I checked my status and found another entry—

“Treasure Chest remodeled 3.”

Apparently that was my current form.

Before anything else, I righted myself. “Hup.”

Let’s recap... I have succeeded in growing an upper half, but...this is totally useless. First off, I have no legs, so I can’t even move! I’d just be able to crawl—er, drag myself with my hands—at best! Also, I can’t equip Crimson Rose like this. If I were to take an attack in this form, I’d be done for in one hit! Well, I’m level 100 now, so I’m probably a little tougher...but the difference between wearing the Crimson Rose and not is like heaven and earth. Not to mention that I lost the ability to alter my point of view, since I have a face now. And to make matters worse, I have the feeling that I’d kick the bucket if my head was destroyed in this state.

It seemed to me that my main “self” was contained in the head. So...

This form’s totally worthless!!! It’s too half-assed to pretend to be human. I wouldn’t be able to travel around like this without raising suspicion. Hmmm... Maybe I could use it to lure people in by pretending to be a girl about to be eaten? But I get the feeling that anyone who’d fall for that would be easy for me to beat anyway...

By the way—even though I wasn’t an expert on human attractiveness, I naturally considered myself beautiful.

I wonder how pretty I actually look? I’m pretty sure I’m good-looking thanks to my gift, but...

I was curious, but there was no way to look at myself. I couldn’t change my point of view, and I didn’t have a mirror, so...

Rustle...

As I was lost in thought, I suddenly felt somebody’s presence.

Of course this would happen! I was too distracted by my new forms and

wasn't paying attention!

Panicked, I turned around to find a thin adventurer with narrow eyes.

Hm? He looks familiar... Ah, the thief I first met in the Aldora Labyrinth! The one who gave me Crimson Rose! Errmm, not sure how to feel about this. On one hand, Crimson Rose has been doing a lot for me—I would've been dead without it. On the other, I can't bring myself to feel genuinely grateful...

The thief looked like his soul had left his body, as if he'd seen something so unbelievable that he'd just shut down...

Oh, it's me. Was he surprised because I have an upper half now?

"What're you doing?" the thief muttered quietly, like the words were just leaking out of his mouth.

"What? Isn't it obvious? I was trying to gain a human form..."

"What happened to your legs?" The thief advanced on me with eerie directness.

Ahhh, oh yeah... This guy was really into stroking my legs back then, wasn't he? Just remembering it gives me goosebumps.

"Ah, well... I was testing out a bunch of things because I wanted a human form and ended up like this..."

"Don't screw with me!"

Scary! Why's he so expressionless?!

"W-Wait a second! Why am I the one getting treated like this?!"

He just keeps getting closer. Hold on a second, you're too close! You're scaring me!

Somehow I didn't get the feeling I could defeat this guy, even though I'd gained a ton of levels. To be fair, I didn't have the benefits of Crimson Rose—or any legs, for that matter—in this form. I couldn't even move. It'd be a comparison of raw strength.

"C-Calm down, okay? I don't like this form either. I was *just* wishing I had legs!"

My desperate appeals got the thief to stop in his tracks.

Wait, when did that knife get in his hands?! Holy shit!

At any rate, there was nothing to gain and everything to lose in this form, so I returned to Treasure Chest remodeled 2. My hips and legs quickly grew under me.

“There we go. So, what did you want again?” I asked.

I was talking to a human, but I couldn’t bring myself to attack him. Not only was he my savior, in a sense, but he wasn’t hostile either.

“Oh, sorry. I lost my composure for a moment there. If you can just grow your legs back, then that’s no problem.”

Huh? Wait, what just happened? I don’t get it.

Suddenly, I noticed that the thief had already disappeared. I still hadn’t figured out what he wanted, but—considering he just up and left—he must’ve been satisfied.

It wasn’t like he could move super fast, so he was probably just hiding and erasing his presence from detection.

Seriously, that’s terrifying!

Wait, don’t tell me... Has he been tailing me this entire time?! I didn’t notice at all! Does that mean he’s watching me from somewhere right now?! Ewwww, I hate that... Well, I guess it’s not like I can do anything about it. So...

I’d managed to grow a lower half and an upper half. So all I had to do now was get both at once!

All righty, I’mma do it!

Chapter 6: Village

It was impossible!

No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't get both halves to appear as one. Not to say it couldn't happen in the future, but it was totally impossible for now.

That put the kibosh on my whole "pretend to be human and have an easy journey" plan. Too bad.

The silver lining was—thanks to using my Mimicry skill to try and change over and over again—my transformations had gotten really smooth.

At the moment, I had four forms I could take. There was the standard Treasure Chest, and Treasure Chest remodeled—the one with just arms and legs. Then, I'd also gained Treasure Chest remodeled 2, which included a lower torso up to the belly button. The arms still came out of the sides of the treasure chest. Lastly, there was Treasure Chest remodeled 3, in which I grew a girl's upper half from the inside of me. There was nothing attached to the chest on any side, so I couldn't move effectively.

The other new form—Treasure Chest remodeled 2—had some perks, so I'd decided to use it as my main form from now on. My attack range had gotten a little longer. Also, thanks to my newly formed hips, I could now twist around and add a bit of force to my kicks too. I'd also gotten another equippable slot on my waist. This could be pretty advantageous, depending on the equipment.

As for the risks, I now had a larger body, which meant more surface area, which meant I was easier to hit. Then again, I probably didn't need to worry all that much—thanks to Crimson Rose, my defenses were sky-high.

Luckily, I still had the clothes I'd bought for Peko. I was a monster, but I still didn't like the idea of walking around with my butt exposed. I put on a pair of panties and a skirt.

I wonder how this looks. Does this make me...cuter? Man, I could really use a mirror right now! For this and other things...

I could change my point of view around my body, but I still couldn't really get a full view of myself.

Anyway, let's go to that village!

I started moving at considerable speed.

Ooohh, it's kinda easier to move now!

Up until now I had no hips to twist around, but now I could walk and run much easier.

Oh man, it was worth getting this lower half mode just for this!

I quickly made it out of the forest, and from there it was a quick jaunt to the village. Though that was partially thanks to Crimson Rose for making my movement speed so fast.

The village was surrounded by a wood fence, but it didn't seem to have had much of an effect against the bandits which were currently invading. Also, the village seemed to be in a tizzy...probably thanks to all the pillaging and rampaging around inside.

Hmmm, what should I do? Well, for now why not just go inside and figure out how I feel?

I heard a shout and noticed something approaching me.

Thumpa, thumpa!

Something's running over.

I waited absentmindedly until I saw a girl run out of the village.

"S-Someone save—eep!"

Hey, come on! That kinda hurt. Why're you scared of little ol' me?

I mean, I was wearing a cute skirt and everything!

The girl, clearly upset, tripped over herself and fell.

Oh boy, she's totally panicked. I bet she's a simple village girl who's being chased by bandits. And she managed to get away, only to run into a monster outside. She's probably feeling hopeless now. I mean, I'm not really interested in

some random bumpkin's weak soul, but there's no way she'd know that.

I trotted over to the village girl. Her legs had probably given out on her, since she didn't even try to run.

"Hello!"

"Eeek! I-It talked?! D-Don't eat me!"

"It's fine, don't worry. I don't eat raw food. What're you doing?"

"Ah, um... My village was attacked. My dad, my mom, and my little sister too! They—"

"Oh, there's someone out here!"

I looked over to the source of the voice, only to see bandits swarming out of the village.

"N-Nooo! Stay away!"

"You an idjit? Whaddaya think would happen by shoutin' that?"

"Ha ha, he's right! C'mon, let's all play together! Everyone's waitin' fer ya!"

"Yer friends, yer mama, and yer lil sister too!"

I stepped in front of the girl and faced the marauders.

"Uhh, excuse me. I was talking to her. Could you not interrupt me?"

"Huh?"

"The hell's this?"

"A monster?"

"Whassit doing out here?"

"Eww, it's creepy!"

"Probably jus' some small fry, right?"

One of the ruffians raised his battle axe and swung it at me. I didn't bother to dodge—there was no need to.

Claaang!

The axe shattered.

Hah! This is nothing!

The bandit was probably proud that he had the strength to swing such a weapon around, but he was still like a child compared to that musclebound asshole.

“Wha—?!”

“Okay... I can see you guys aren’t worth exploding, sooo...it’s time to test my level 100 strength!”

There was no way us girls would be able to relax and have a conversation with them around, and they were the perfect little guinea pigs. I decided to play with them a little.

By the way, this *definitely* wasn’t influenced by the fact that they called me creepy!

Anyway...

There were five of them in front of me.

Oh, that reminds me—I just assumed they were bandits, but I wonder if that’s true? Not that it matters. I designate thee bandits A through E, from left to right.

“Mimic Low Kick!”

My stunning leg slammed into bandit C’s knee—the one with the axe. My attack sent him spinning in his spot so that, when his head hit the ground, his neck bent in an unnatural direction.

Yep. Way too weak. This is barely even worth it as a test of my strength.

“Mimic High Kick!”

I moved to bandit A’s left side, got in front, shifted my body, extended my leg, and kicked him in the head. I twisted my pivot leg so that I could follow through with my kick ending diagonally downwards.

Skwursh!

The bandit’s head slammed into the ground, deforming it into an undefinable mess.

Ooohh, having long legs is nice! I can do high kicks easily, and they have a real snap to them now thanks to these new hips! But, um, there's no way this was some rookie move, right? I can't say for sure, but maybe I was some sort of beautiful martial artist or something?

"You bastaaarrd!" bandit B screamed as he sliced at me with his sword, but I ignored him.

C-Claanng!

It didn't even itch, let alone hurt.

Was there anything else I wanted to try? Maybe a punch...?

My arms were kind of restricted because of their position, though. It was probably safe to assume they were just there for support.

Next...

"Mimic YAKUZA Kick!" It was just a normal front kick, but I was aiming at the knees.

Bgwhyipe!

Bandit B let out a strange noise as his knee snapped and his leg bent in a way it wasn't meant to.

Well, the way my strength is now, I'd deal major damage no matter where I kicked. Still, isn't it amazing that I can aim for the knee with perfect timing and precision?

There were only two bandits left, so...

"Mimic Whirlwind Kick!"

That descriptor probably wasn't enough, so to elaborate: this was a move where I started with a spinning kick. I used the momentum from that attack to carry my right pivot foot into a kick as well. Simply put, I'd spin around once so that I could make a one-two combo with both feet.

Both bandits E and D went flying. Naturally, I landed clean hits, so their necks bent in weird directions when they landed.

Huh, I'm starting to notice a common trend. Oh, right—bandit B only has his

leg broken, so he's still alive.

I raised my leg up high. "Mimic Axe Kick!"

The bandit's head was an easy target because he was crouching down.

THUD!

The end of my high heel buried itself into his skull with great force.

The outcome was never in question but, well, I guess it was good practice! Whew, that felt great! It was so easy and free compared to how I used to be!

"Now then, let's continue our conversation." I turned to face the village girl, my legs still dripping with blood.

"Yesh! H-Help me! Someone please help me!" the girl yelped, clearly terrified. She was shaking so hard while she crouched down, it almost looked like she was vibrating.

I guess I shouldn't expect anything else. I'm a monster and I did go pretty ham back there. She probably thinks she's up next.

"Calm down. I just want to talk. If you won't, though, I can just kill you instead."

I'd only approached her on a whim, so I really didn't need to stick around if she was just going to be terrified. I waited a bit for her to settle down.

After a while, she'd collected herself enough to ask, "U-Umm...what did you need?"

Oh, that's unexpected. She calmed down more than I thought she would. That's definitely points in her favor.

"My name's Harumi. What's yours?"

"My name is Suama. Umm, what did you..."

"I only recently became able to speak human. I haven't had much chance to use it, so I just wanted to try it out, to be honest. I don't really care what we talk about."

"I see... Why did you come here, Miss Harumi?"

“I don’t really have any business in this place in particular, but I was wondering if I could find a mirror. Maybe your village has one?”

“A...mirror? I have one.”

“Oh, that’s great! Gimme.”

Obviously worried about something, Suama paused, then pleaded, “Umm, I’ll give it to you, so could you help me?”

“Mmm? You mean like a trade?”

“Ah, ummm... Not anything that formal... The mirror’s in my house, and the bandits are still there... So maybe you could get rid of them while going to get it...”

Hm...what to do? I’m being bribed here, but part of me feels like doing a human’s bidding would impact the dignity of monsters as a whole... Still, ignoring Suama to go for another mirror somewhere seems like too much work.

“Sure. Lead me there.”

“O-Okay!”

So, in the end, I had her show me to her place.

Chapter 7: Struggle

Suama started walking towards the village, so I followed beside her.

“Seriously though, what do these bandits even want? I ran into a few earlier and they were all shouting about how they’d just finished a job. So what’s with the punks who’re still here?”

“I don’t know. They just came all of a sudden, and for some reason, the adventurer who usually protects the village wasn’t there. They turned this place into a mess. Almost everybody got captured and taken away...except for my family. For some reason, we were left behind...”

“Huhhh? I wonder why. Maybe they thought you weren’t worth taking back?”

“Maybe... I’m not exactly cute, so I can’t really say much as a comeback.”

Actually, I’d say Suama’s rather pretty. If her entire family’s the same way, maybe they were looking forward to, uh...something else from them? Even so, they could’ve just taken them and separated them later...so what was their goal here?

“Ah, we’re here. It’s that house.” She pointed to what was basically a hovel—there wasn’t any sort of supportive structure underneath it.

Well, I guess this is what you get in a poor village...

“Ohh, I see. Here? How big is your family?”

“There’s five of us. Me, my parents, my little sister, and my brother.”

“I’ll just say this upfront so there aren’t any misunderstandings: I’m not planning to save your family or anything. They might die while I’m fighting those bastards.”

“Right. Well...”

Well, it wasn’t like I was gonna go out of my way to kill her family either. I just wouldn’t be expressly protecting them.

“Okay, Suama, wait here.”

As I approached the girl’s house, I tried to gauge what was going on inside.

Hmmm? I can’t really sense anything... Wouldn’t it be a bit noisier if they’re having a, ahem...fun...time in there?

I peeked in through a latticed window. My new hips had increased my height slightly, and it had started to come in handy already!

The house had been ransacked, but there was no one around.

“There’s no one here, Suama. Where’s the mirror?”

“It’s inside the cabinet in my room.”

Suama walked over, so we entered the house together. The cabinet in question had also clearly been rifled through. Although Suama rummaged around looking for her mirror, it was nowhere to be found.

“They might’ve taken it. It’s very obviously one of the few things in our house worth any money...”

Urrghh, it’ll be a total pain to find if some random bandit has it... Oh well, I only wanted a mirror so I could get a proper look at myself. I could still do the same thing with a big enough pond or something.

“Excuse me! I think there should also be a mirror in the village chief’s house,” Suama added.

“But they might have taken that one too, right?”

“That’s, uh...well, yeah...”

Oh well, it was still better than looking about randomly.

“Just take me there,” I commanded.

“Okay!”

So we left Suama’s house and walked forth. She led me to one side of the village, where the biggest and best house in the entire settlement was located. The village itself wasn’t that large, so I caught sight of the house right away. I also couldn’t help but notice the fact that there were people there. Well, more specifically, they were gathered in front of the warehouse that had been built

beside the house.

There were a total of ten people who looked like bandits, three of which were actively pounding on the warehouse doors.

“Git out here *now*! Don’t ya care about yer precious lil mum?!”

“Ahhh, poor lady—her husband’s already been chopped to pieces! He’s in the afterlife fer sure!”

There were also people that might’ve been Suama’s family—her father, mother, and little sister—by the bandits, but they were clearly on their last legs.

“Eek...!” Suama squeaked, then swallowed in a breath. At least the fact that she hadn’t screamed meant that she’d retained some measure of calm...or maybe not. She might’ve been at a loss for words instead!

“Humans are always like this... Monsters kill people too, but we never just toy with our victims... Wait, maybe some of us do?”

Well, at least that wasn’t true for me!

So let’s break down what’s going on here—Suama’s little brother has shut himself in the warehouse and won’t open the doors. The bandits outside are torturing their family so that he’ll come out on his own... I think?

That was just my guess, though, so I could’ve been completely off base. It’s not like I understood why they would want a little boy from out in the sticks so badly.

“What should we do?” I asked. “It doesn’t really look like there’s a point in killing these guys at this point.”

I could tell from a single glance that Suama’s family was probably a lost cause. Monsters or adventurers might’ve been able to heal with a potion, but there was no tincture in the world that would have an effect on a regular human in such rough shape.

“I-I’ll do anything you want. Anything! Please kill them!”

“Anything? Nothing really comes to min—wait, no, there is *one* thing. Oh, *fine*. I originally promised I’d kill the bandits for you anyway, so I’ll do it. You just go hide somewhere.”

“O-Okay. Please...” Suama stuttered after a pause.

She tottered into a nearby building, unsteady on her feet. The look in her eyes told me she was out of it, so I couldn’t help but worry.

Will she be all right? Well, anyway, I should take care of this quick.

I trotted right up behind them. They had their undivided attention on the warehouse, so I managed to approach them easily. I *could’ve* ambushed them, sure, but they looked so weak that I didn’t really want to bother.

“Hello!”

“Took you long enough! All you had to do was catch one little girl... WHAT THE HELL’RE YOU?!” The bandit who turned around was hit with a major surprise. I mean, it wasn’t like anyone just expected a walking treasure chest.

“What am I? I’m a mimic who’s passing by!”

“Dammit! The other guys must’ve taken too long...to think they attracted monsters!”

Huh? What does he mean by that?

I had questions, but then I heard something coming up behind me. I turned my field of view around, only to find a gaggle of monsters behind me. There were goblins, orcs, skeletons, and a bunch of other creatures that looked like total small fry. All the group had going for them was numbers.

Huhhh? What’s going on? There shouldn’t be any monsters around here, at least from what I’d heard.

From what I’d been told, the closest monster base was the Forest of Darkness—aka the place I was heading for. At any rate, the base was defensive, so the monsters there wouldn’t attack villages.

I decided to make use of one of the new plug-ins I’d bought. “Targeting!”

It was just an ability that allowed me to lock onto someone, so it was rather useless if I didn’t have a skill that targeted people. It did have one other perk, though—when used against a monster, it would tell me what force they belonged to!

With that, I selected a random monster in the group, and it was soon bordered by a blue light.

I see...so these guys are monsters under the blue demon lord.

“Ah, that reminds me! When you go, you’ll probably run into other monsters, Harumi. Make sure you don’t just pick fights willy-nilly, okay? Get along with your fellow monster!” Lord Aldora had shouted to me as I exited her room.

“Well, of course, I wouldn’t go out of my way to fight them.”

“Yep, please stick to that! Oh, but the blue ones are different. You can kill them, no questions asked. Actually, if you turn tail in front of any of them, I’ll kill *you*! Got it?”

Huh? Did I hear wrong, or did she just say something freakishly violent with that sugary-sweet tone?

“We work under the red demon lord, so they’re our sworn enemies. We won’t let any of them survive!”

“There’s more than one demon lord?”

“Yep! There’s a total of eight right now. Normally they don’t interfere with each other, but each one holds their own grudges and stuff. It’s actually pretty complicated...”

“Is that so? I see...”

“Anyway, this area is under the control of the red demon lord, so I’m pretty sure you don’t need to worry about any of that. But...”

I’d just remembered what Lord Aldora had said to me.

I see. So they’re the blue ones. But why’re they here in this village?

While I was distracted by that thought, the monsters swarmed the warehouse.

From their perspective, I should’ve been an enemy—a follower of the red demon lord—but they all passed by as if they didn’t care about me at all.

As for the bandits, they'd escaped to the sidelines and were waiting and watching. Of course they'd run—they were outnumbered, after all.

"What the hell?" I also crossed over to one side to try to figure out what was going on, only to be approached from the back again. This time, it was a force of adventurers.

These guys also glanced at me, but passed in favor of attacking the monsters that were swarming the warehouse.

The situation had gotten so confusing I was about to blow my top! So...

"Argghh, whatever! I don't care anymore! Mimic Dash!"

With fleet-footed ease, I sprinted into the fighting crowd.

"Explosive Legs! Explosive Legs! Explosive Legs! Explosive Legs!"

I kicked anything I could on my way through the crowd. After I'd managed to land some blows, I returned to my original position.

Once I'd returned, I snapped my fingers with what I felt was perfect timing. Wait, don't get me wrong—my skill was time based, so it had nothing to do with my snap, okay?

KaBOOBOOBOOBOOBOOM!

Incredibly loud explosions chained together behind me.

"Ahh, that feels better!"

Oh man, what was up with all that? All those guys just showed up out of nowhere, ignored me, and started to fight among themselves! That really pissed me off!

I turned around to review the results of my work.

"Ah!"

The warehouse had gotten caught up in the explosions, and was now totally gone.

Yeahhh...the explosions get way stronger when they overlap with others... That warehouse was in a pretty safe spot too...

“I kinda get the feeling that they were fighting over something inside... Oh well!”

I still did a good thing!

Chapter 8: Comrades

Well, it wasn't like it was my job to figure out what had just happened, so I'd just keep doing what I had to—in short, retrieving all the souls and spirits!

I went over to the explosion site.

Hmmm...I don't feel much coming in. When I checked my level, it'd only gone up to 102. This is it? This is what I get for all those kills? Either these guys were all super weak, or Peko's soul was seriously something special. Oh, or maybe I was too late coming over, and most of the souls have already dissipated. Hm, or it could just be much harder to raise levels now...

Or maybe it's all of that? Maybe all of those reasons just piled up on each other, and this is the result. Anyway, I should also gather the spirits...though they're so shitty that it seems like a big waste of time... I'm starting to run out of Spirit Catchers too.

I decided to capture them anyway, since—unlike in the dungeon—I wouldn't just be shown the results of my work. The only proof I'd beaten anyone would be what I'd gathered myself. Plus, I could only accumulate points now by exchanging spirits.

Whatever. I'll just snag whatever I can and think about it when I run out of Spirit Catchers.

I tossed out Spirit Catchers one after the other.

Once the spirits were in the flasks, their characteristics were much clearer. There was a wide variety of colors, shapes, and levels of shine to them. I couldn't really tell what all that meant, but there was one that was clearly different among the ones I'd gathered. Its shine couldn't compare to the others—it might've even been better than Peko's.

Oohh, I think I got something rare! Lucky me!

With that, I'd finished the retrieval work. There were quite a lot of spirits that had managed to get away, though, and I couldn't help but wonder if those had

belonged to the monsters. It was just a hunch, but it seemed to me that monsters were better at moving around as spirits.

Okay, what now? Oh yeah, I have to look for the mirror.

With that decided, I walked over to the house where Suama was hiding.

“Suamaaaaa! I’m doooone!” I called out.

The girl wobbled outside. When she saw the tragic scene in front of her, she slumped limply to the ground.

“A-Are d-dad...and mom...?”

“Uhhh, they should be somewhere in there?” I pointed over at ground zero, a hellish site that totally looked like it would eventually be the source of legends about some serial killer who used explosives. Not a single body had retained its original form, so I’d be hard pressed to point out any individuals.

“Sorry, but their condition was already hopeless. I thought that they’d be better off with a swift death—you know, so they wouldn’t suffer,” I replied, trying to make excuses.

It didn’t seem like Suama was listening. The light had gone out of her eyes, as if her soul had left her body.

Oh jeez, she’s looking pretty broken. What should I do? I was planning on having her help me disguise myself, but at this rate she’ll be useless. I was counting on her too! I mean, she was able to calm down and talk to a monster like me!

I was pretty sure things wouldn’t have gone this well with most other people. Even if I wanted to try and find someone else, there was no one left in the village. Other settlements would be a crapshoot too. I mean, even assuming I bothered to find another one, who was to say the humans there would even give me the time of day?

That’s when I decided to try something desperate.

“Well, how would you like me to bring your family back to life, Suama?”

I called it the devil—er, the mimic’s—whisper!

The second those words left whatever passed for my mouth, Suama slowly got up to look at me. I produced a Spirit Catcher flask from my storage.

“What you see in these is basically like a soul for you humans! I just snagged them, so I think it might be possible to revive your family with these!”

“That’s a lie... The father at the church said that death is the end for humans...that we all go to where God is...”

It’s not a lie. I seriously think it’s possible, though it’s just a thought I had. Sorry if it doesn’t work out!

“I don’t know about any god, but at the very least I’ve heard of monsters and adventurers coming back to life. Also, the souls wouldn’t be able to go to your god if I’ve already caught them.”

Though she might be right that normal humans can’t be revived.

“So come on! Help me out here, and I’ll at least try it out.”

Agghh, not being able to pretend it’s a sure thing is one of my weak points, isn’t it? Still, I don’t like the idea of lying...

“You’re telling...the truth? Will you really bring them back...?” Suama asked, gradually returning to her old self.

“Mmm, well... That’s only if your family’s souls are in here somewhere,” I said before dumping out the filled flasks I had.

“The spirits all look like that, but it seems like they know what’s going on around them. Try calling out to your family.”

“Dad! Mom! Monaca! Alfred! It’s me, Suama! Do you recognize me?!” Suama called out to the flasks, and several of them reacted differently.

Seriously? Man, I guess everything really is worth trying once.

It looked like the super-rare-looking spirit was Alfred’s. I picked out the flask that seemed like it had Monaca inside and handed it to Suama.

“What do you...?”

“Why not just keep it on you for now? If you help me, I’ll give them all back to you. I’ll even help you try to resurrect them.”

Suama gripped the Monaca flask tightly. After a pause, she cried out, “I understand. I’ll help you, Harumi!”

All right! That’s a human underling for me!

I’d figured that the carrot would work better than the stick.

“Okay, then let’s go find that mirror first!” I exclaimed.

“Right. I think it should be in the village chief’s house somewhere.”

“It might’ve been stolen already, but we might as well check.”

We walked casually towards the village chief’s house.

Oh man, I’m glad the house wasn’t caught in the explosions too!

We found the mirror right away—the large glass, meant to allow someone to check their overall appearance, had been hung up on the wall by the entrance hall. Mirrors were expensive, but the bandits probably thought lugging something that big around would be too much work.

Anyway, here it was. I transformed into my Treasure Chest remodeled 3 form so I could look at my upper half.

“Go!”

The change happened instantly. My legs disappeared, my treasure chest fell to the ground, the lid opened up, and a girl’s upper half popped out.

“I didn’t know you could do that, Harumi.”

“How is it? Am I cute?”

“Yes, very! B-But you aren’t wearing any clothes... It’s a little distracting.”

I had several sets of clothes, so I decided I’d try some on later. The most important thing right now was my face.

Yep. Super cute.

My eyes were nice and large, but not freakishly so. I had long eyelashes, a nice petite face, and clear ivory skin.

I could use this to manipulate men...if it weren’t for the fact that it looked like I was being eaten by a treasure chest! Still, it’s really motivating to know how

cute I am. I like this feeling!

And that marked the end of the flashback. Yep, that had all been a flashback!

Suama was currently riding on top of me. Apparently she would be too high up if I were to use the form with hips, and she wasn't a fan of heights, so I was using the first Treasure Chest remodeled form at the moment. As a refresher, that was the one where my legs stuck directly out from the treasure chest.

We could've just walked together, but I'd decided earlier that I'd appear more like a tamed monster if she rode on top of me.

We'd left the village and were on the way to a nearby town. My destination, the Forest of Darkness, would be beyond that.

"Umm, I get that I'm supposed to act like a monster tamer, but what exactly should I be doing to help...?" Suama asked while fidgeting nervously.

"My goal's to get to the northern continent, but seeing a monster walk around on the surface would cause a huge fuss, right? That's why I need your help, Suama, so I can disguise myself and pass by unnoticed."

"Um, so does that mean this is the normal style for monster tamers? There was a swordsman and a mage in my village, so I know what they're like, but..."

"Hmmm, dunno. Maybe?"

Yeeaahh, this plan's full of holes, isn't it? I mean, I don't know jack about monster tamers! I'm sure Lord Aldora's just as clueless as I am—she probably pulled this idea out of a hat. Oh well, at least one thing's probably true—the monster tamer job exists.

"Hey, how does someone become an adventurer in the first place?"

"I'm not sure. Farmers like me and my family don't need to know that, so I never learned."

It was clear that there was something that separated adventurers from normal people, but I didn't know if whatever it was had to be natural or if it could be acquired. The fact that Suama didn't know made me think that such information wasn't public.

“Hey, are there going to be any adventurers in the town we’re going to?”

“Yes, there’s a guild. The guards for our village came from there.”

The guild’s main source of activity is probably the Forest of Darkness, then.

At any rate, there was no other choice but to test our cover out. Would the mimic with beautiful legs and her pretty tamer pass?

So first we need to go to the town’s Adventurer’s Guild. Bring it on!

Chapter 9: Side Story *The Aldora Labyrinth Council Aftermath*

The usual Aldora Labyrinth council members were gathered in the usual conference room.

There was Walter, the chairman; Bison, the warrior; and Satoh, the merchant. They were called the pillars of the council, but that was simply because they were the only ones that felt a semblance of responsibility. Everyone else rarely showed their faces.

They all sat in a row on one side of a table. On the other side was a familiar face—Marinnie, the arachne from the Aldora Labyrinth. She was also a member of the council, albeit as a representative of the Aldora Labyrinth's management.

"You have some nerve showing your face like this!" Walter yelled as he slammed his fist on the table.

"You're the ones who called me. Why am I being chewed out for this?" Marinnie asked, exasperated.

"How large do you think our losses are?!"

"These things happen from time to time, don't they? What with us being a dungeon and all."

"Damn youuuu!"

"We called you here to discuss the mimic. We're sure this isn't the case, but you aren't intending to place her back on the first floor, are you?" Bison stepped in, asking with a serious tone. He must've thought that the conversation wouldn't go anywhere if Walter was left at the helm.

They'd assumed that the problem would be solved once the season was over, but there was still a need to confirm. The next season had already started, but the council couldn't afford to let adventurers inside the dungeon without confirming the situation had been resolved first.

“We’ve already solved the problem. The mimic’s been banished.”

“So you’re saying you’re no longer involved with her?”

“We’ve cut all ties, so yes. Formally, we don’t have anything to do with her anymore. Still, we know that your side’s suffered some major losses, and my words won’t cut it. Take this. Consider it, well, a sort of apology,” Marinnie said, taking out some flasks. “These’re the spirits of those who entered the dungeon at the end of the season. You can have them back.”

There were a total of four flasks. Their shine conveyed the quality of the spirits held inside.

“Oh? We never expected you to actually return the silver ranks and above.”

The council members knew that the monsters’ purpose was to collect spirits, so none of them expected such strong specimens to be returned.

“We won’t be giving back the hero, though.”

“Hero?” the three of them questioned in utter surprise.

“Bison, didn’t you say that the hero refused us?”

“I did. I was told by Azuratt, our go-between, that negotiations had failed.”

“What’s going on here? The hero went in on his own? And he died too?”

“Huh? Did I just step on a land mine? Oh well, the truth’s the truth,” Marinnie said before immediately taking her leave. She most likely wanted to avoid being questioned about the hero.

“W-Well, still... It’s not like we hired and sent him in. He just went in on his own and died, so we have nothing to do with it, right...?”

“Right. If we were to force her to return his spirit, it would actually raise questions about our involvement too...”

Heroes were precious, so it was necessary to be careful with their deployment. If others were to accept that the council members had sent him into such a small dungeon in the boonies—and, to make matters worse, gotten him killed—they wouldn’t be able to avoid taking responsibility for the screwup.

“Anyway, this would mean that the incident at Amami Village was...”

“Indeed. The mimic might be the culprit. In fact, it might be the only one capable of such a thing. But I have no idea why such large forces had gathered out in the sticks. There wasn’t anything important out there...”

Everyone knew the mimic used explosions, which left the bodies of her victims maimed in a very showy fashion. That fit the aftermath of the Amami village incident to a T.

“Johannes knows about that as well,” Bison added.

“Johannes again?! Wasn’t he gravely injured?! He can already move around?!”

“Indeed. He’s managed to replace what he lost. He left the hospital immediately afterwards, saying that he could move as long as he had his limbs.”

“Man, that Johannes is incredible...”

“He’s the type of man who will endure any amount of pain for his mission.”

“But wouldn’t there be a limit to that? He’s human, after all. Anyway, what’s the news?”

“Right. Johannes had been inquiring into the whereabouts of the Hero King’s son. Ah, this was before the incident, by the way.”

“Wait a second! Why is Johannes involved in such an important-sounding task?!”

There existed a country—Tamarkand—which always had a hero ascend to the throne. Their existence under a hero’s reign had lasted a long time. However, several years earlier, Tamarkand had been destroyed after being invaded by a neighboring country, and the royal family was said to have been completely eradicated.

“Don’t ask me!” Bison snapped.

“Wait, I figured you’d say ‘because it’s Johannes’... Well, whatever. Anyway, what happened with the investigation?”

“He apparently found the missing son in Amami village.”

“I see. So the scene at the village was a free-for-all to claim the prize? But why

did this happen all of a sudden when he hadn't been found for all this time...?"

"Johannes is weak to wine and women. You can't trust him when it comes to that."

"Huh?! You can't seriously be saying that he leaked such incredible info so easily, can you?!"

"Apparently he picked up a woman he met at a bar, and by the time he'd woken up, he'd been stripped of everything and left in some back alley."

"You realize my trust in Johannes is plummeting by the second, right?!"

"He does have a naughty side."

"That isn't just 'naughty'!" Satoh yelled. He paused to calm down, then continued, "Anyway... Leaving that aside, what happened afterwards?"

"Right. The information leaked into the underworld. Because of that, several different factions raced to secure the boy."

"And let me guess—those factions were the monsters and the bandits?"

A part of the monster horde had been in contact with the humans. If the information had been making its way around the human population, then the monsters should've also caught wind of it.

"The bandits were probably after money. With the Hero King's pedigree, they would've been able to sell the kid for a good price to the Hortan Empire. As for the monsters, they were just making the obvious decision to try and take out a potential threat, given the kid could become a hero. It also seems like some nearby adventurers noticed what was happening and moved to deal with the monsters, but..."

"That was when the mimic came in and dealt with all of them."

Silence fell upon the room. All three of them had sunk into deep reflection, trying to come up with a way to deal with the threat they were facing.

"Well, there's that. I'm frustrated to have to put it into words, but..." Walter's voice was almost a whisper.

Their jurisdiction only extended as far as the Aldora Labyrinth. There wasn't

much point in chasing after the mimic only to incur even more losses.

“Yeah. If it won’t be coming back, then...”

That was when they heard a low, creepy voice speaking to them. “That’s pretty cowardly of you.”

The three turned towards the voice. At some point, a black...*something*...had slipped into a corner of the room.

Its entire body was covered in black fur. It literally looked like a bipedal beast with a horn, a pair of wings, and a tail.

Though the council had dealings with monsters, they had never seen this particular one.

“Name yourself!” Bison demanded.

“Don’t worry about me. I just came to retrieve my incompetent disciple. His name is Norton, the Polar Star. Hand him over.” The monster pointed to a flask that had been left on the table.

“What nonsense! You’re a monster!”

“Now who’s the one spouting nonsense? I’m human. I simply took in bits of monsters in my attempts to dive into the depths of magic.”

Is that even possible? the three council members all thought at the same time.

Meanwhile, the black figure had already come up right next to them. The heavy stench of a beast, as well as of death, assaulted them. The abomination was giving off a miasma that made them want to vomit.

No one was able to object as the black figure took the flask it wanted.

“What are you planning to do with that?” Bison asked.

“Well, the first thing I’ll probably do after reviving him is give him a good scolding. If he got killed by the likes of a mimic, he’s going to need strict retraining. Then, I’ll need to wipe away the stain of disgrace I’ve left on my school. That mimic will get what’s coming to it.”

With that, the abomination suddenly disappeared.

“Just...what was that?” Walter barely managed to squeeze out.

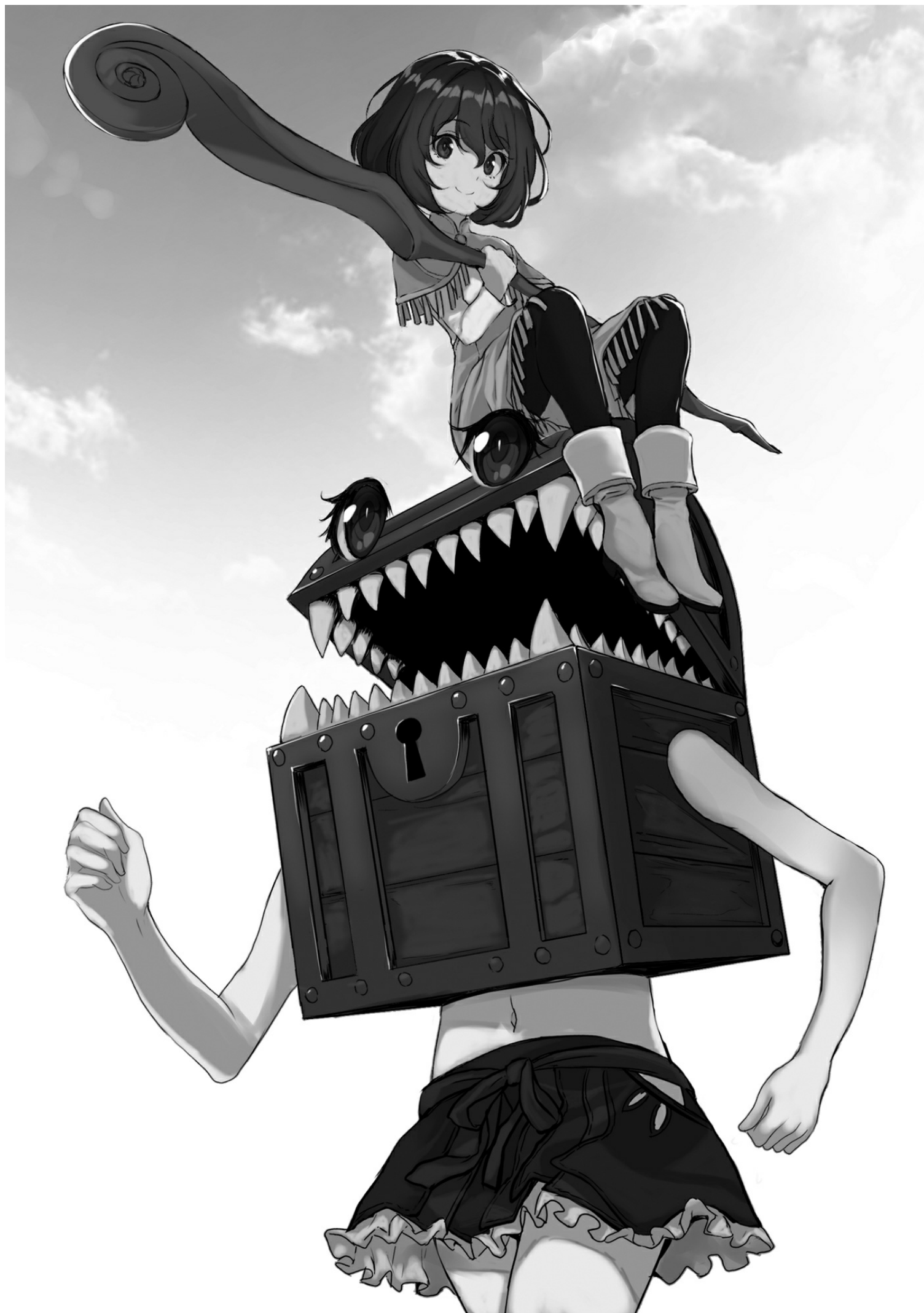
“If that was...Norton’s master, then he would be, um, Garellia, the Polar Sky. He should be the head of a school of magic, but...” Bison replied, before thinking, *He doesn’t seem human. If he were to go all out with the name of his school on the line, what would happen?*

He couldn’t help but shiver at the thought of the tragedy that was about to happen.

Chapter 10: Town

I'd left the Aldora Labyrinth in the morning and reached Suama's village by noon. After everything that had happened there, it was now almost evening.

I was walking leisurely, Suama riding on top of me, when the town came into sight.



Unlike the village, this town was surrounded by sturdy-looking stone walls. There was also a gate with guards stationed outside. Given their defenses, I was pretty sure this place didn't have to worry as much about invasions.

So entering this town was our current goal. It was time to put our disguise to the test—would our tamer-with-monster getup work out?

If we were to trip up here, our future prospects would be grim. I had the feeling that being rejected at this checkpoint would also mean ill omens towards any future hardship as well.

“Have you been here before, Suama?”

“I have—to sell off our harvest. I'm familiar with the gate guards too.”

“Ahhh, I see... Not sure if that's good or not. Would they accept a farmer girl who used to come to sell vegetables suddenly becoming a monster tamer?”

“Yeah... Could you leave that to me? I'll deal with it somehow.”

“Okay, sure.”

Suama jumped off of me. Her movements were light and dexterous.

Is she the type who's good at physical activity?

The girl proceeded to walk ahead of me.

“Hello, Mamoru!” Suama reached the front of the gate and smiled as she greeted him. The supposed-Mamoru became a little bashful in response.

Is this guy...interested in my Suama?

“Hello...wait, what happened?! You're all beat up!”

Now that he'd mentioned it, I realized that Suama's clothes were ragged thanks to earlier events.

Oh, whoops. I have clothes, so I should've given something to her. Not only that, but she's totally empty-handed. There're so many reasons to be suspicious of her! C'mon, Harumi! You gotta realize stuff like this beforehand!

By the way, the guard seemed so preoccupied with Suama that he hadn't even noticed me behind her.

How have you not been fired, man?

“Umm, my village was attacked by bandits, so I ran.”

“Whaaaaat?! That’s terrible!”

“It is! I need to make a report to the lord!”

I see... So the lord of this territory is in this town.

“Oh, you’re alone though. What about your family...?”

“They were all...killed...”

Mamoru’s expression turned grief-stricken. “That’s...never mind. I suppose it’s good that at least you managed to get away, Suama.”

Suama walked into the town, so I followed her.

“Wait just a second! What’s *that*?!” Mamoru’s eyes popped open, wide as saucers, as he finally noticed me.

Yeah, I guess I was being too optimistic, hoping he’d just let me through without noticing.

“Oh, um... For some reason, this monster got really attached to me. It’s not scary, you know! It won’t attack people or anything like that!”

I totally will, though!

“R-Really? But wait, letting a monster inside would be...”

“Nyaaa!” I decided to try and cozy up to him to appeal for entry, so I nuzzled against his legs.

Look, I’m not scary! I’m just a super cute treasure chest!

“It’s not...dangerous? It’s actually kinda cu—Ouch, that hurts! The corners are digging into me!”

“Nya?” I backed up a bit and played dumb.

How’s that? Can’t take the cuteness, huh?! Murder’s not all I’m good for!

“W-Well, at least it doesn’t seem violent... It’s still a little creepy though.”

What?! That’s it! Should I just kill him?

“Yeah. Also, aren’t there monster tamers inside already?”

“Hmmm, you’re right... But that’s supposed to be some kind of job where monsters are treated as equipment...”

“I’m also thinking of becoming one. The fact that this one’s attached to me must mean that I’ve got some talent for it. I’m all alone now, so all I can do is rely on something as vague as talent. Please, could you let it in?” Suama begged with tears in her eyes.

Oh, that did it. Mamoru’s caving!

“Okay. But you have to go to the Adventurer’s Guild first thing for a consultation. That’s the place to go if you’re going to try and get into the adventuring life—especially with a monster.”

“Got it! Thank you so much!”

Uhhh... Is Suama amazing, or is Mamoru just super easy? Maybe...the former? Being able to get him to wave away a monster by giving him puppy dog eyes and the right words isn’t something just anyone can do.

Anyway, we were allowed into the city.

Both the streets and the buildings had been constructed with stone. Everything looked very sturdy, and I really got the impression that this place was on a much higher level than Suama’s village.

Also, we were being stared at. Actually, it was mostly just me.

The only reason I hadn’t caused some sort of fuss was because there were already a lot of adventurers in this town, and a fair number of other monsters were being led around by them. Still, just from a quick look it didn’t seem as if monster taming was a very popular practice.

There could only be one other reason for all the stares—they must’ve been thinking, *A treasure chest with legs? What’s going on?!*

“Right. What do we do now?”

“We probably should actually go to the Adventurer’s Guild. Umm... I know I said all that just to get us through the gate, but if we’re going to be traveling together, then we should get proper qualifications. At least, that’s what I

think...”

“Is it that easy to become an adventurer?”

“I don’t know. But my dad said that adventuring is a job only people with no other skills or prospects in life fall into, so couldn’t anyone become one?”

Wow, Suama’s dad! Talk about harsh! Still, I wonder... Well, we definitely shouldn’t just waltz through town. That’d be boring, since we already got in and everything.

“Let’s go, then.”

We decided to head for the guild straight away.

Badump, Badump!

Man, this makes me nervous. It’s basically my enemy’s headquarters, so it’s kinda like going into the belly of the beast! They might find us out, and—even worse—they might be too strong for me to deal with. Then again, I might learn a lot about adventurers. That could be valuable in its own right.

The Adventurer’s Guild was located near the town’s entrance. The building was a bare, unadorned affair, but it was still in contention for the largest structure in town. Apparently, its size was because the Forest of Darkness was so close. The guild was probably seen as a vital facility to the town.

“Let’s go in.” Suama prepared herself and swung the door open wide.

It was fairly spacious inside. The floor was dotted with several tables, and adventurers were spread out amongst them. Most of them were lying around drunk, though—it seemed that the place also doubled as a bar.

It’s still around noon! Shape up! Hey, what’s with those pages posted on the wall? Are people recruiting for party members or something?

I’d kind of expected the place to be more jam-packed and noisy, but that didn’t turn out to be the case. That was probably just because proper adventurers would be out exploring during the day.

There was a counter with a bored-looking female clerk sitting behind it. She seemed like a receptionist.

“Is that the reception?” I asked.

“Looks like it. Right...” Suama walked over to the woman and called out.

The spaced-out lady flinched after noticing Suama and sat straight up. “Ah, yes? What do you need? A request?”

“No, umm... I want to become an adventurer. Do I just do that here?”

“Huh? *You*?” The lady looked Suama over intently.

“Yes, is that a problem?”

“It’s not, but what does your family think about it? Have you talked it over with them?”

“My family...is gone. I’m alone now, so I want to become an adventurer to make a living.”

The receptionist’s expression became strained. “I see... As an employee of the guild, I don’t have the right to refuse you, but I personally don’t agree with this...”

Yeah, of course she wouldn’t. Adventurers are all weirdos, and anyone would be worried about Suama mixing with a crowd like that while going out on her own.

Suddenly, some guy—one of the drunkards that had been lazing about—nosed his way in. “Gya ha ha ha ha! *You*, an adventurer?! In what world would that be possible?!”

The middle-aged guy was huge, complete with a dense, scruffy beard. In general, he seemed totally crude.

“B-But if I don’t, I can’t make a living...”

“Why not just sell your body? There’re a bunch of places for that in this town, y’know? I could even introduce you to one!” The middle-aged asshole stared at Suama lecherously, practically undressing her with his eyes.

Okay, now I’m mad!

I stepped in between the guy and Suama.

“*Huuuh*? The hell’s this thing? A mimic? Aw, did you gain a li’l confidence

'cause you tamed this thing?"

Thrnk!

I swiftly kicked the man's shin. Of course, I made sure to hold back—I wasn't foolish enough to go on a rampage in a place like this.

"Make fun of...Suama. Will not...forgive."

"What? This thing talks? Hah, that kick barely even itched!"

Thrnk! Thrnk! Thrnk!

"I said it doesn't hurt! ...Hey, wait! Stop!" The man didn't try to run. Either he was underestimating me as a mimic, or he still hadn't had his fill of teasing Suama.

Fine then!

Thrnk! Thrnk! Thrnk! Thrnk! Thrnk! Thrnk!

Snap!

The asshole's shin snapped, and his leg bent in a strange direction as he fell.
"Gyaarrgghh!"

That's right! I'd been testing how much to hold back this whole time! After all, if I'd gone all-out, his leg might've flown clean off! Hell, it might've even hit the building and destroyed it!

Suama completely ignored the fallen man and declared to the receptionist, "I want to become a monster tamer!"

"Yeah... Looks like you're well on your way." The woman actually seemed impressed.

Chapter 11: Adventurer's Guild

"You fucker! What did you do?!" Some men—I assumed they were friends of the fallen asshole—stood up to threaten us. I took a quick glance at them. None of them seemed especially strong.

Ahh, of course this would happen. Too bad I'm not patient enough to just wait this out and let them get their hits in... Oh well, it'll all work out somehow!

Suddenly, I was assaulted by an incredibly loud voice coming from right next to me. "Shut up! You got thrashed by a newbie, and you think you can get angry about it?! You louts!"

I flinched—mostly in surprise, but also slightly in fear—and whirled around. It was the receptionist lady. She was glaring at the adventurers with a scarily intense expression.

Her outburst had caused them to freeze on the spot.

Oh wow. That's crazy cool. Of course you'd need this kind of impact to control these ruffians.

Still, one of them tried to argue back. "B-But there's no way we can just let that go. She hurt our friend..."

"So?! This girl is a newbie! You'd be a disgrace to adventurers everywhere if you laid a hand on her! I would've let it go if you'd only teased her a little—like a hazing ritual—but to retaliate just because she fought back?! Have you idiots even *considered* the possibility she'd actually defeat all of you?!"

"Th-Then how about after she becomes an adventurer..."

"*Huuuh?! You want to drag in stuff from the past?! Of course that shit doesn't count! If that's how you want to play, I could go and dig up all the dirt from your filthy history and turn you in! Would you like that?! The only reason you useless twats get to survive is because you follow the adventurer's rules! You know what happens the second you break one, right?! Listen to me—lay one hand on this girl for what happened today and see what happens!*"

Uhhh, yeah... She's a total gangster. Monsters are like that too, but I never thought I'd see a human like this. Wait, wouldn't that mean that we've just been fighting in some kinda turf war?

As for the angry adventurers, they trudged their way out without another word. It didn't seem like the others would try anything either.

"Sorry for yelling like that. I just got a little heated up," the woman at the counter said.

"Oh, sure. No problem," Suama replied, super alarmed. Well, that's a given—even I was a little scared at that display.

"However, I would ask that you please refrain from such behavior in the future. Conflict between adventurers is strictly forbidden. You could be met with strict punishment."

We'd just been warned in no uncertain terms, so Suama bowed her head meekly. "I understand. I'll be careful."

Ahh, I might've been too gung ho just now. I need to start handling this sort of thing better. Still, I can't get rid of the idea that I can just let loose and go wild in the worst-case scenario, and it'll all work out somehow! I wonder if that part of me comes from being a disposable monster... Well, that'll go on the list to be worked on later.

"All right then... If you want to be an adventurer, you just need to register to become one. Anyone can apply and call themselves an adventurer, after all. Just fill in the required information on this form."

The receptionist handed Suama a pen and a paper, and Suama immediately reacted with a troubled look.

"We do offer scribe services for a fee," the woman added.

I didn't want Suama to be embarrassed, so I poked her a little before saying, "Let's borrow a table over there."

"Ah, okay."

We occupied the table vacated by the adventurer whose shin I'd broken earlier and his friends. I had to change into my form with a complete lower half.

If I didn't, I wouldn't be able to sit in a chair.

"I have Human Language +2, so I can read and write."

"Wow, Harumi—you're really skilled even though you're a monster."

I quickly jotted down the necessary information on the form. They only required the basics, like her name and place of birth. There were also entries for special abilities, equipment, and other traits. This section was included to make it easier for other adventurers to notice and recruit newcomers. However, there wasn't anything special to note there for now.

Hm? Why are the surroundings so noisy?

"We stand out a little, don't we?" Suama noted.

"Ahhh, yeah you're right."

I guess a mimic with a woman's lower torso *would* stand out—especially if she were sitting and actually writing too. Not that it really mattered. We would probably be subjected to rude stares like this from now on, but it'd be best to ignore them and keep our heads held high.

"I can teach you to write," I added.

"Really?!"

"Later, okay?"

Suama seemed pretty smart. I had a hunch that she'd pick things up quickly once I taught her.

At any rate, I'd finished filling out the form, so I turned it in to the receptionist. It seemed that there were no problems with the form, so she retreated to a back room and returned quickly.

"This is your adventurer's card. Keep it on you at all times. Most adventurers keep them in card holders hung around their necks so that they can be seen easily by others. You can get a card holder from over there."

We followed the receptionist lady's line of sight to what looked like a store.

Wow, that's cheap.

"Excuse me, but does our card work in other guilds?" Suama asked.

“It does. You can use it as a form of identification in this town, as well as others. However, your achievements are listed on the card. If you haven’t accomplished much, it may be hard to gain others’ trust. Please be aware of that.”

I see. It’s nice that you can use it in other places too.

“Also, you’re required to choose a job and register for it. Jobs determine what equipment is available to you. For example, if you choose to become a warrior, you’d get a sword and shield. Mages get staves, and so on and so forth. You’d like to be a monster tamer, correct? If that’s the case, you’ll need a monster training staff. We sell those here as well!”

“Sorry, I don’t really understand. If I get a staff, does that mean I’ll become a mage? Will I be able to cast magic?”

“You’re half right. If you don guild-approved mage equipment, you’ll be treated as one. However, you won’t be able to use magic just because you have the equipment. *That* requires study and training to be able to use, just like using monsters. Well, it seems like you’re fine on that front, Suama.”

My first thought was, Hm? Then what are jobs? Maybe it’s just a way for guilds to categorize abilities? Oh well. If she needs a staff, then we’ll just have to buy it at the store.

“Umm, I don’t have any money...” Suama said hesitantly.

“Don’t worry, I do,” I replied. “Still, you’d be up shit creek if it weren’t for me, huh?”

“Yeah...but if you hadn’t arrived, Harumi, I never would’ve lived long enough to run into trouble like this.”

Oops. It sounded like I thought she owed me. I didn’t mean to put it like that.

I opened my lid and pulled some money out—loot from adventurers I’d killed in the Aldora Labyrinth. Their currency was worthless to monsters, but I saved it just in case.

“Tell me if it isn’t enough. I still have more.”

“These are...gold coins, aren’t they? I’ve never seen them before.”

Whoops, that was a little dangerous. Looks like I've still got things to learn.

I had no idea about human values or how they determined such things. Well, it wasn't like I expected the guild store to rip us off...too much, anyway.

We ended up just buying the essentials: a monster training staff and a card holder. We had no idea which staff would be best, so we'd left it up to the store clerk.

"It looks kinda like...how should I put it? Like something you'd use to beat dust out of a futon."

"Yeah...it's like a royal fern, I guess?"

The staff was long enough that it could reach Suama's shoulders if it was placed upright on the floor. The tip of the staff was shaped like a swirl, much like a fiddlehead.

Apparently, the swirled tip was used to hit monsters in order to train them. Also, we were told that it could extend and act like a makeshift whip if the staff was swung hard enough.

"Okay, this completes your registration as a monster tamer."

After returning and showing the new staff to the receptionist, we finished up.

"Umm, is this really all it takes to become an adventurer? I heard that they can easily recover from serious wounds, or even come back to life."

Oohh, I remember hearing that too. She has a point—if you could gain such amazing powers just by filling out some forms and buying some equipment, everyone would become an adventurer.

"Well, yes, but neither of those things are simple processes. Well, it's true that you could say that you've stopped being human, though. With the paperwork down, you're now a follower of the Adventuring God, Est. The advantages adventurers gain are all referred to as the Divine Protection of Est."

"Oh, but I'm a follower of the Harvest God, LocoMeco."

"You didn't know? Becoming an adventurer is like converting religions. Also, Est does not allow a change in beliefs, so you can no longer go back."

“I see... Okay, I understand.”

Suama seemed totally floored, but I guess she'd steeled herself after hearing the news.

By the way, apparently most humans tended to balk at the idea of changing patron deities. Though the protections of the Adventuring God were wonderfully strong, adventurers had to live by a strict set of rules, so there weren't many who were willing to become one.

“Well, my job as a receptionist is done. From now on, it all depends on you. Why don't you find a senior monster tamer to learn from?”

Makes sense—of course we can't just name ourselves monster tamers without more work.

The receptionist lady told us about several other colleagues we could see.

Okay, let's go meet one of them!

Chapter 12: Monster Tamer

We headed straight for one of the monster tamers' homes after leaving the Adventurer's Guild.

I was walking alongside Suama as the sun was gradually setting over the town. I could've just given her a ride on top of me, but we weren't very far from our destination. Plus, we didn't want to stand out too much.

"Still, I kinda feel that you get way too much just for changing your religion. Like, you can become an adventurer just like that? It's way too easy," I said.

"But if you do, you won't be able to live a normal life anymore. Aren't there a lot of people who'd consider it a pretty big con?"

Adventurers were bound by a ton of rules. As you could probably guess by their name, they were forced to go on adventures and fight. They wouldn't be able to live peacefully.

"Oh well. Even if it's easy to become one, most adventurers die right away anyway. I guess that's how you weed them out; like, survival of the fittest and all that."

In that respect, they were similar to monsters. Both sides kept producing low-level fodder and throwing them into battle with the expectation that they'd die. That way, any who survived would be a pleasant surprise.

But wait—wouldn't that mean those with money or status could hire guides to protect them while they explored? Oof, the world sure is unfair!

Anyway, Suama seemed a little excited after getting her card, so I had to jump in before she got carried away. I had absolutely *zero* intention of letting Suama gain any achievements as an adventurer. Even our trip to the tamer's house was to perfect our cover.

"Oh, but don't get the wrong idea, okay? We're not going to actually be adventurers. This was just part of our disguise so we can blend into human society. One of my goals is to kill adventurers to level up. Don't forget that

you're the one helping me, Suama. That's right—you're the one who fell for a mimic's sweet whispers! You're a soldier for the forces of darkness now!"

Though, from what Lord Aldora told me, there's at least two of these forces!

"Yes, I know. I'm prepared."

Well, I guess I wouldn't mind letting her go once I reach my destination.

The extent of my plan so far had been to find a human conspirator, because it'd make traveling through the central continent much easier. There would be no point in taking her to the northern continent with me.

After we'd walked a little more, we quickly reached the residence of the monster tamer, Dolhoi.

"Wow, it's fancier than the village chief's place!"

We were in front of a chic-looking mansion.

Apparently, adventurers tended to go wherever their escapades led them, so it was rare for one to have a permanent home. Though, to be fair, I suspected many didn't have a place because of a lack of money. The owner of this mansion was a silver-ranked adventurer, so it seemed that he'd managed to collect an unusual amount of money and vault himself up through social strata.

We passed through the front garden to the entrance of the mansion proper. When Suama used the door's knocker, it opened right away.

There was a maid on the other side of the door, but she was strangely tall. It immediately stood out to me, so I looked down at her feet. She didn't have any.

She was a lamia, a species of snake-like monster.

I see. So he's leaving the housework to the monsters he's tamed.

"The guild has told us about you two. Please, come inside."

Oohh, she has the Human Language skill! Nice going!

The lamia showed us to a parlor room, and we obediently filed inside.

As we walked through the mansion, we spotted a harpy, a centaur, a mermaid, and a dryad. They were all in maid uniforms too.

“Umm...all these monsters are female, aren’t they?”

“Yeah, I noticed that too.”

His preferences are really showing, aren’t they? Whatever, it’s not like I care what he’s into.

We waited on the sofa for a little while until the door opened.

A man with a delicate, slender build and noble attire entered. He was clearly Dolhoi, and—if we were to believe the receptionist from the guild—he was an incredibly talented monster tamer.

“Hey! So you’re the girl who’s aiming to become a monster tamer, are y—
GYAAARRGHH!”

As soon as Dolhoi entered the room, he jumped right back out of it.

Hm? What’s up with him?

“Umm...are you okay?” Suama stood up and walked out into the hallway, so I followed her.

Dolhoi had fallen onto his ass. “Wh-Wh-Why’s there a level 102 abomination in here?!”

Oh. He’s talking about me. That reminds me—I still haven’t bought an Appraisal-type skill, so I don’t know what the average level for an adventurer is. But if mine’s too high, then why hasn’t anyone else made a big deal of it?

“Umm...please don’t be afraid. Harumi’s the monster I tamed, so...”

“D-Don’t lie to me! That one’s wild! She isn’t tame—no one would be able to do it!”

Ohhh, he can tell that too. But that’s a problem... It looks like he’s figured us out. We can’t even talk to him now.

I walked right up to Dolhoi.

“Hello, hello! I’m Harumi, the mimic! If you don’t tell me what I want to know, I’ll kill you. You okay with that?”

“O-Okay, I get it! I’m not too sure what this is, but I’ll tell you! I’ll tell you anything!”

Negotiations complete!

We had returned to the parlor room. Suama and I were sitting on a sofa, and Dolhoi was sitting opposite to us.

Dolhoi, having finally seemed to calm down, spoke. "So, what exactly are you —"

"You're not the one who gets to ask questions here," I stated firmly.

"Y-Yes!"

"First, I don't look like a tamed monster to you, right? Why's that?"

"Why...? Anyone would figure that out the moment they look at your stats. A monster tamer records the number of monsters they own, each one also has the tamed status on it."

"Oohh, so the plan was over before it began! But no one really raised a fuss on the way here. I wonder why?"

"That's because you're a mimic. Your ability also disguises your stats. If it didn't, then you'd be found out right away when you'd try to disguise yourself as a treasure chest in a dungeon, right? When it comes to someone of my level, that sort of ruse won't work, though!"

Ahh, he's just started talking, but he's already on his high horse. Oh well. It's better than having him freak out over every little thing.

"Then what would we need to do to pretend?"

"Hmmm... You probably don't need to worry about most adventurers, since you can only see the status by being a monster tamer yourself. If you want to deceive others like me, then you need to raise the level of your Mimicry skill."

I see... My Mimicry skill, huh? I gained more forms after raising my level, but I wonder if that's different from the skill level as a whole? I'll have to ask another monster about that later. At least, if I find one that looks like they'd know.

"Next question: are mimics like me strange or unusual? I've been wondering for a while now..."

I had other comrades in the dungeon, but none of them could grow limbs. I'd also been getting plenty of stares in town. If my very existence was strange or unusual, then it could present a lot of problems down the line.

"I would say that you...barely pass as a mimic. Mimics tend to have a lot of subspecies, anyway. In your case...I would say your base is a treasure box. As for your limbs... Although I can't guess their original purpose, maybe they're meant to be like bait. That would sound plausible for monsters like you."

Bait? Like the light from a deep-sea anglerfish?

"I see. So that means there're mimics that aren't treasure chests, then?"

"Many. They take all sorts of forms, such as vases, pots, or boulders. No matter what they camouflage themselves as, they always lay in wait for adventurers to get too close so they can attack."

"Well, I'd still like to avoid being stared at and treated like something weird..."

"If you don't like that, then just increase the number of tamed monsters. Most tamers have multiple, after all, and you wouldn't stand out as much with others around you. Some prefer to summon their monsters only in battle, but if you're trying to pretend to be a pair, then you'll want to keep several around you at all times."

Dolhoi taught us about how to capture, tame, and fight with monsters.

"That should do it, I think?"

"Yeah! Sooo I guess all that's left is to take care of you. I mean, since you know who we are..."

"What?! But I told you everything! That's just cruel!"

"Awww! But isn't there just, like, no merit in keeping you alive? It'd be a lot of trouble if you reported us to the guild too..."

"I won't tell anyone about you guys!"

Hmmm, well... If I kill him now, then the suspicion will automatically fall on Suama. That'd be bad too... But at the same time, I can't just take him for his word.

“Then let’s make a contract. I’ll answer your summons once, Dolhoi. In return, you’ll keep us a secret,” I suggested.

There were two main ways for a monster tamer to tame a monster. The first was to force a monster to submit and enslave them. The second was to form a contract with them. Well, this was all information I’d just heard from him, though.

“As for the terms, well... It’ll be my choice whether or not I actually answer the summons. If I do, I’ll fight on your behalf to the best of my ability for one minute. After that, I’ll be returned to the place I was summoned from, got it? Oh, and you’ll need to bear the brunt of costs to summon and send me back. I’m not chipping in my souls for it. Also, if you breach the terms of this contract and leak information about us, you die. Okay?”

“Th-That’s so one-sided... Actually, I *guess* it’s actually a pretty good deal if it lets me borrow the power of a level 100+ monster, even if just once...”

It’d be pointless to just threaten him and leave. If I actually wanted him to keep a promise, there needed to be some sort of give-and-take.

“Fine, let’s do it. Contract Scroll!”

Dolhoi produced a large roll of parchment from nowhere and started jotting down the terms of the contract.

“Umm...are you sure about this, Harumi? What if he adds in some sort of wordy clause that’s hard to understand, but screws you over?” Suama whispered into my ear.

This girl’s so good at taking care of others!

“Don’t worry, it’ll be fine. There’ll be a warning if he does anything like that.”

I could see the terms written on the scroll; it had popped up in front of me. Everything had been written exactly as I’d specified—he hadn’t added anything, or left anything out.

[Agree to the contract? Y/N]

Up came the pop-up. If there was anything suspicious about the contract, I would've seen a warning here. That's just how the system was! I clicked "yes" without hesitation.

The scroll glowed bright to signify the formation of the contract. The physical copy itself would be kept by the human side.

As for me, I could now view details about the contract from my status window at any time.

"All righty! To celebrate, give us something monster tamer—like. Suama only has her staff."

"Wait now! How brazen can you get?!"

"Awww, don't be so stingy! It'll be a present for a cute junior in your field! Come on, look at her—her clothes are totally ragged, and they're all she has! Don't you feel sorry for her? Just give her a hand-me-down or something!"

From here on out, the contract was no longer in the picture. I just had to wring out as many favors from him as possible!

"Sure, but... What can a level 1 even use...? Ahh! There's *that*!"

Dolhoi snapped his fingers, summoning a lamia. He gave her some instructions to retrieve a piece of clothing. The article itself was cute and girly.

"Oohh! Is this some sort of amazing equipment or something?"

"No, it's just regular clothing. Though it *is* fairly high quality."

"Booo! Booooo! How cheap can you get?! Give us something better!"

"I have equipment to raise a monster tamer's abilities, but none of it would do anything for her."

"Whaaat?! You can't just get rid of the level restrictions?"

"Of course I can't! I've heard rumors of that happening, but I don't have the slightest idea how—or where—to even start such a process!"

Huhhh? I was told that's what happened to the Crimson Rose I'm wearing, though. Does this mean that was an exception, not the norm? That'd mean that thief is something else... Well, that sure raises a lot of questions... Oh well. Not

like thinking about it now will accomplish anything!

Dolhoi placed two rings on the table. “This is the real present: a pair of rings called the Bonds of Unity.”

“The red and blue rings form a single item. The level requirement is 30, but only one of the wearers needs to fulfill that.”

“So this would be for the two of us to use?”

“There can be even more users if you can prepare more rings. The effect is to allow the wearer of the blue ring to take any damage caused to the wearer of the red ring. This is something like a nice little trick, only available to us monster tamers.”

“Oh ho...so you’d force the blue ring onto a monster so that they’d take the hits for you? You’re pretty bad yourself, ha ha!”

“That sounds worse than it is, but you’re essentially correct. Even if you were to take fatal damage as the wearer of the red ring, you’d be completely unscathed. Meanwhile, the wearer of the blue would die instead. Even if they can’t absorb all the damage, any excess would just be canceled as the wearer dies.”

Sounds like this would be a forbidden item to use between humans.

“I see...that sounds pretty useful. Are you sure we can take it?”

“You’re the one that told me to hand it over... It’s fine, I don’t need it anymore.”

“Then we’ll gladly accept.”

Both my hands were occupied by Rings of the Greedy, so I removed the one on my left hand to make room for the blue ring.

Suama wore the red one.

“Oh, that reminds me—you haven’t eaten anything today, have you, Suama?”

“No. I’m very hungry.”

Dolhoi’s face twisted in surprise. “You’re going to try to weasel food out of me too?!”

“What? It’s already evening. I just figured we might as well stay with you till morning!”

Dolhoi looked like he absolutely hated the idea, but he didn’t tell us to leave.

Chapter 13: Side Story *The Forest of Darkness's Adventurer's Guild*

The Adventurer's Guild of the town located near the Forest of Darkness was in a tumultuous riot.

Why? Because a dangerous-looking monster had gotten inside. The creature in question was a bipedal beast covered in black fur. It also had horns, wings, and a tail. It was clearly powerful and also exuded an ominous, sinister aura.

All the adventurers in the building hurriedly used their Appraisal skills on it, but they couldn't glean anything—its status was being concealed.

"Damn you!" An adventurer, probably unable to take the fear anymore, took his life into his own hands and charged at the monster.

Swip-THUD!

The adventurer was easily neutralized by the monster's tail. He crashed into the wall and collapsed. Luckily, he wasn't dead—just unconscious.

"You bastards! Behold—this is the great Garellia, the Polar Sky! Show some respect!" the receptionist shouted at the crowd.

Her words froze the combat-ready adventurers in their tracks.

"Are you sure? That thing's totally a monster."

"Yeah, there's no way that's a human, right?"

"I agree, but...if Éclair says so, then maybe it's true..."

The beast-slash-supposed-human Garellia, who looked every bit the poster child of a vicious monster, slowly walked over to the receptionist.

"It's been a while, Éclair."

"I believe I have told you before to refrain from walking around town in that form, sir..."

“It is inefficient to go through the trouble of taking human form, though.”

“So, what do you need? Seeing as how you brought your entire school with you, this can’t be a simple visit.”

Virtually everyone had been too preoccupied with Garellia’s appearance to have noticed, but he’d arrived with a full retinue of students trailing behind him. They all donned robes and wielded staves.

“Norton’s been killed. I must avenge him for the reputation of my school.”

“Unbelievable...to think Sir Norton was killed!”

“Are there any rumors of mimics in this area?”

“Mimics?” she asked, then paused for a second to think. “Now that you mention it, a monster tamer came by recently—a girl with a mimic in tow.”

“That should be the one I am looking for. Mimics would be a rare sight in town, after all. That girl must be camouflage. How unfortunate for her.”

Despite Garellia’s monstrous appearance, he still retained a base amount of common sense. He felt empathy and concern for an uninvolved girl who’d been dragged into the mess.

“I introduced the girl to a monster tamer named Dolhoi, so they should be there right now.”

“I see. Thank you.” Garellia turned on his heels.

“Um, I should go with—”

“You have your job at the guild.”

He immediately shut down Éclair’s attempt to forcefully accompany them. She turned away, sullen.

Meanwhile, Johannes was observing everything that happened from a corner of the guild.

Chapter 14: Forest

We managed to pressure Dolhoi into letting us crash at his place, and it was now the next morning. After we'd also had him feed us breakfast, we left for the forest.

The forest could only be described as dim, damp, and dismal. The ground was also super uneven and muddy. Plus, there were monsters wandering about.

Yep, that was the dungeon.

I could practically hear the peanut gallery again. "Hey, aren't dungeons supposed to be underground?!" Nope! Actually, any area that was possessed and dominated by monsters was considered a dungeon! That was just how things were, so no objections! Well, not that I'd be able to do anything even if someone *did* complain about it.

The forest was right next to town, and anyone was able to enter—I mean, it was a forest after all. The entrance to my birthplace, the Aldora Labyrinth, was monitored and controlled. Considering you could just waltz into a forest from any direction, it was impossible to control, unlike my home.

Anyway, I was currently in my Treasure Chest remodeled 2 form—you know, the one with hips. Suama was walking beside me.

"Why did you want to come here, Harumi?"

"I don't actually have any business here in particular. This is just the neighboring dungeon, and it's on the way. We're just swinging by for pleasantries and all that. Well, there should also be some stores around here that I can use my points at, so I'm planning to do a little shopping too."

There were many ways for a monster to become stronger. They could gather souls, hone their skills, attempt to awaken new ones through the heat of battle, or study magic and skills. All those were fine and dandy, but the fastest way to become stronger was to buy skills and items with points.

Points were essentially a unit trust placed in the monster. That meant we

could use it anywhere other monsters gathered.

“First, I want an Appraisal-type skill. Sounds like it would be useful.”

“There’re stores like that in the forest?”

“Other than that... Hm, maybe we should level you up, Suama? You’re definitely too weak as you are now—wait, uggghhh!”

“What’s wrong?”

“What would you even fight, Suama?!”

Yep, we had a problem finding potential targets. The forest belonged to the monsters aligned under the red demon lord, just as I was. They were comrades, so there was no way I could use them for experience...well, not without extremely good reason, anyway.

Apparently it was also strictly forbidden for adventurers to do the same to their colleagues.

“Hmmm, maybe it’ll be fine if I just kill adventurers? I’m not actually tamed, so it’s not like you’d be murdering them. Plus, if you’re nearby, you can still absorb some of the souls and get stronger, I think.”

So, in order to put that idea into action, I took off the Ring of the Greedy from my right hand. I didn’t want to hog everything for myself, after all.

It would’ve been best if *she* could wear the ring, but it required the wearer to be over level 15.

“All righty then! No matter what the plan is, we need to get to the maintenance area first.”

That being said, I had no idea where it could be!

Maybe it’s in the very center of the forest?

Normally, it *would* be placed in a spot where adventurers couldn’t reach it. We’d be stuck here for days if I were to search blindly for it, though.

But I have this thing! I opened my lid and used my tongue to take something out.

“Ta-daaa! A back-entrance passport!”

Suama stared fixedly at the piece of paper I was holding.

“This is a monster-only item that allows me to go directly to the maintenance area! Lord Aldora gave it to me!”

“How do you use it?”

“Apparently, you just stick it somewhere inside the dungeon, and a door will appear. There’ll be a lot of people at the entrance to the dungeon, though, and it’ll be trouble if we’re seen using this. That’s why we came in this far.”

“Um, but...it looks like someone is coming, Harumi,” Suama muttered, sounding apologetic for some reason.

“Huh?”

Yep. Now that she’d mentioned it, I could sense something coming into the forest and towards us.

Swshh, swshh. Drip, drip.

I couldn’t see because of all the trees, but something was definitely walking our way.

Ahh, yeah... I really do need a skill or ability to detect enemies.

Even if I was stronger now, I still couldn’t really detect bloodlust, or avoid attacks from behind like a certain master combatant.

What should I do...?

If it was a monster, it would most likely be a red faction ally, so there wouldn’t be much of a problem. If I were to claim Suama as my prey, I was pretty sure no one would butt in.

However, if the approaching threat was a human, they would definitely be an adventurer, given how far they’d come into the forest. In that case, I could have Suama greet them.

Either way, I should be clear to use the passport after they leave.

I was sure that the other party knew we were here too, so it would be weird to run and hide at this point.

Let’s just act confident and wait for them.

“Heh heh... I finally caught up to you.”

As it turned out, our mystery guests had familiar faces. At this point, I was at a loss for words. The moment I saw them, I understood what they were here for. We were being accosted by the crude adventurer we’d beaten back at the guild and his friends.

I’d broken that man’s leg, but he was back and in perfect condition.

He must’ve used magic or some kinda item to heal himself.

“Hey, weren’t fights between adventurers supposed to be forbidden?” I mentioned.

“*Huuuhhh*?! How could anyone possibly find out?! Who’d report it back to the guild? It’s survival of the fittest in a dungeon, y’know! Wait...is it just me, or is that thing real fluent all of a sudden? Also, ain’t it bigger than before?”

Oops—forgot to speak like an idiot. Oh well.

“Question! I was told that fights inside the dungeon are all recorded inside the adventurer’s card. Wouldn’t disputes between adventurers also be imprinted on that?”

“Hah! I thought you two were full of yourselves. So you were using that as a crutch, huh? Well, get a load of this—you can’t fool an adventurer’s card or its recording abilities, but it’s easy to not have it record in the first place!”

“For the record: how do you do that?”

“It’s simple—you just have to push the off button on the back of the card. With just that, no one’ll ever know about the awful things that’re about to happen to you!”

“I see...”

While I was busy being impressed by that newfound knowledge, Suama immediately pressed the button on the back of her card.

Good. I like how she’s so intuitive!

“It’s-Been-A-While-Mimic-Pinball!” I jump-kicked a nearby tree and used the recoil to bounce straight towards the adventurers.

THKTHKTHKTHKTHKTHK!

I ricocheted off the trees in all directions, and the adventurers were wiped out in a flash.

Oohh, being able to take advantage of 3D space in places like this is really nice!

“Ah, Suama! Come here, quick!”

“O-Okay!” Suama trotted over as quickly as she could.

“How is it? Did you get stronger?”

“Maybe? I’m not sure.”

She should’ve absorbed some of the dissipating souls, but did she? I can’t see other people’s statuses. Oh well, we’ll just have to keep doing it.

There were a lot of rules surrounding soul absorption. For example, it was easier to take them from victims you’ve finished yourself, stronger enemies gave you more, and so on. In other words, those that didn’t fight weren’t able to absorb much just from being nearby. The world wasn’t that easy!

“Oh, while we’re on the subject—can you see your own status, Suama?”

“Status? What’s that?”

Actually, how does that work for them?

In my case, I just kind of knew vaguely what it was and how to access it, but I wondered how it was for adventurers. I’ve heard them talking about levels and such, so I figured they were like monsters in that respect.

“Well, we can just ask another adventurer about that later. Anyway, now that the interruption’s gone...” I tried using the passport by slapping it on a nearby tree. “I wonder what’ll happen. This is kind of exciting!”

“Ah, it’s glowing.”

The passport started to give off light...

Fwoosh!

It burnt up.

“What?” Is that the sign of it activating?

Nope. The passport had simply burned up.

Fwapfwapfwap!

Flocks of birds took flight all at once. The surrounding forest had gotten eerily quiet, causing the dim surroundings to seem even darker.

“It’s starting to feel really dangerous.”

“Um, Harumi...when did...?”

Yeah, I know I said that I wouldn’t know bloodlust earlier, but I take that back!

Even I was able to pick up on something this obvious.

We were surrounded by monsters that had popped up out of nowhere.

Huh? Why? This dungeon belongs to one of Lord Aldora’s acquaintances, right? I don’t think there’s any reason for them to be this angry at us...

However, I quickly realized the problem—they weren’t from the red faction; they were blue. Everything clicked into place.

Even though this area was under the control of the red faction, an army of blue monsters had attacked Suama’s village somehow. That meant there must’ve been a blue base in the area.

So, with all that said, I could guess that this place had been taken over by blue monsters.

“I can see you know nothing from the fact that you tried to use a red passport, which has been rendered invalid.” One of the monsters came to the front as it spoke. It had blue skin, a single horn on its forehead, and human clothes that seemed like it belonged to a noble. *“But that doesn’t matter—all red monsters must die. I am the demon gen—”*

“Mimic Missile!”

“Bgyarrghh!”

I slammed the corner of my treasure chest right into his gut. Then I followed up, jumping at him as he flew away.

“Explosive Legs!”

KaBOOM!

I made ground meat out of the demon gen-whatever-he-was-going-to-say.

I’m the same—all blues must die! All righty, it’s time for you guys to become my exp!

Chapter 15: Attack

I started by taking out the most dangerous-looking one. The rest were all fairly strong, but I figured I could make it work with them.

There were two main problems. First, the enemies were spread out, so I couldn't blow them up all at once. Second, while I'd managed to escape being surrounded thanks to blowing up that demon gen-whatever-guy, I'd left Suama right in the middle of the action.

I decided to ignore Suama. I know it sounded cold, but if I were to try to haphazardly protect her, I'd be giving them a potential hostage target.

Although there was a possibility that they'd assume we were in cahoots because we were traveling together, I still figured it'd be faster to clean them up as fast as possible rather than to fight defensively.

Plus, we had the rings on. Thanks to them, any damage Suama took would be transferred to me, so she'd be fine! She'd be fine, right? I hadn't actually tested the rings yet, so I had no idea how this would all turn out.

"Take this! Mimic High Kick!" I dashed towards a monkey-like monster and attacked it.

Ka-thwoom!

The monkey's head flew right off.

They weren't very strong, so I didn't even need the explosions. Well, given how scattered everyone was on the battlefield, it was likely that Suama would've gotten hurt by the blasts too, so that was off-limits for this battle.

Next!

I charged once again. However, this time I lagged a little. Yep. Although it seemed very obvious, my means of locomotion for attacking naturally made things a little complicated.

It was pretty hard to run around while kicking, and I needed to stop for a

moment to really get my hips behind the attack. I'd managed to run by while hitting things with Explosive Legs before, but that didn't seem like it would work unless the target had really let their guard down.

That's why I'd started with a tackle against that demon gen-what's-his-name. I instinctively felt that a kick wouldn't work.

The next enemy was a lizard-man wielding a sword and board. Although it'd been unclear with the monkey, this one clearly reacted to my actions.

Still...

"Mimic Missile!"

Don't underestimate how tough my treasure chest is! Defending with a shield? Like that matters! I can easily destroy your defenses!

I kicked off the ground, accelerated, and charged straight into the lizard-man.

Crunch!

I slammed my treasure chest body straight into his shield. The lizard-man managed to brace himself and remain upright. However, he was unable to fully absorb the impact, and his shield was thrown upwards.

"Take this! Mimic Knee!" I grabbed the lizard-man's scruff and forced him to bend forward while bringing my knee up into his gut.

Bwomp!

The force exploded out the lizard-man's backside, and I followed up with a punch that sent him flying. He went crashing into a pig-man's face, and they both bit the dust.

"Hwaaahh! Mimic Axe Kick!" I jumped up and attacked a centaur, aiming at its horse-half.

You're a huge target, idiot!

He tried to intercept me with his bow, but I was too fast. The centaur's horse-half was easily bisected in one strike by my heel.

Clang!

Grr! I was just attacked from behind! I swung my field of view around to find a

praying mantis—man. *So was that its scythes just now? Oh well, not like it hurt at all!*

“Mimic Rear Kick!”

Using the motion of my hips, I planted a kick straight behind me. The mantis-man crossed its arm-scythes to block, but my kick simply snapped them on the way through. His thin, stick-like body was easily broken.

Considering the amount of bloodshed they’d just witnessed, the other enemies must’ve finally started to understand the difference in our strength. The skeletons and wardogs turned tail and ran.

“Heh heh, did you really think I’d allow you to get away?!”

Oops, I’m feeling weirdly excited!

I dashed forwards, cutting off the runners’ means of escape.

Yeah, these guys are the weakest of the weak!

“Y-You! What are you?! Your strength’s too abnormal!”

“No matter how many times I get asked that, it’s the same answer every time. I’m a mimic who’s just passing by.”

I kicked them. My target seemed to let his guard down, since my attack didn’t seem that serious, but they were sorely mistaken. At this point, I figured Suama was far enough away.

“Explosive Legs!”

KaBOOM!

Two of them were reduced to dust. The enemy had been utterly eliminated, so Suama ran up to me.

“Harumi, are you okay?!”

“Yeah, these enemies were easy peasy!”

Oohh, my level went up a little! Demon gen-num-nums must’ve been worth quite a bit!

“But this place has been taken over by those blue bastards, so I guess we

don't need to stay here anymore."

I wasn't sure what had happened here, but it didn't seem like I'd be able to reclaim the dungeon by myself. If we went farther in, it felt like I'd start meeting enemies that I'd be no match for.

We should get out of here quick.

"I know we only just got here, but it seems dangerous. Let's leave."

Of course, Suama didn't object, so we immediately turned around and went back. Luckily, we hadn't gotten too deep into the forest, so it should've been easy to leave... "Should've been" were the key words here.

Suddenly, I felt a sudden impact that sent me tumbling over.

"Ouch!"

I'd let my guard down, so I ended up taking some unexpected damage straight to the face. Still, it wasn't too bad.

"Harumi! Are you all right?!"

"Y-Yeah, I am, but..." I looked around while lying on the ground. We were almost out of the forest and onto the road outside. I didn't really notice anything in particular, but that made things even more suspicious.

I started to observe our surroundings even more carefully, but I still couldn't find anything in the end. Suama was also looking around.

"Do you sense something strange, Suama?"

She shook her head.

Yeahh...it's really suspicious, but we can't just stay still forever.

"Well, let's just be careful as we keep going, I guess." I got up and slowly made my way forth.

Thunk!

Once again, I was hit by something. However, this time I was expecting it, so at least I was spared the embarrassment of eating dirt again.

"Hm? Mmmm?"

I stretched out my hand towards the area where I'd felt the impact.

Plorp, ploplop!

There was something there...something invisible. I tried feeling around, and found that there seemed to be a set of walls placed around me.

"Um, Harumi, what...?"

Suama was looking at me from the other side of the invisible walls.

"There seems to be some kinda barrier...wait, why are you fine, Suama? What?! What is this! Hey!"

Slam! Slam!

I tried hitting and kicking whatever was penning me in, but they wouldn't budge.

Hello, I'm the one kicking here! How tough can these walls get?!

"It is useless. That is a barrier impassable to monsters. You are, quite literally, trapped like a rat." The line came suddenly and unexpectedly. The one who spoke was a furry bestial abomination, much more monster-like than I was.



I immediately used my Targeting plug-in to try and determine what faction it was from, but there was no color. In other words, it was human.

Then, one after the other, hooded figures started showing themselves.

“I-I see...? If you humans had something this useful, wouldn’t fighting monsters be a walk in the park? I wonder why you guys haven’t used this up till now?”

I forced myself to talk nonchalantly, even though I was seriously worried about my current situation.

“It is a secret technique of my school. In truth, it is not that convenient. You need a lot of human resources to be able to use it. It never ends up as big as you want it, and the casters need to be inside as well.”

“Suama, run!”

“O-Okay!”

She didn’t hesitate. There was nothing she could do, even if she stuck close to me, and she knew that I would do the same if the situation were reversed.

The furry thing didn’t chase after Suama. The casters needed to be on the inside of the barrier, but with so many people gathered, it was natural to think that there were also people stationed outside. That should’ve meant a few of them could’ve restrained her.

“She’s gone. You okay with that?”

“She does not matter. You are our only target. In fact, she should be under our protection, since you have been dragging her around with threats.”

Oohh! Contrary to his looks, he’s actually a pretty good person!

“Looks like you’ve got a serious grudge against me, but I don’t remember ever meeting you.”

“That is exactly why I bothered to show myself to you. There would be no point if you were to be destroyed without any inkling of why you were purged. You must die while regretting your actions. My name is Garellia. Norton, the man you killed in the Aldora Labyrinth, was my pupil!”

“Uh... Sure? I don’t remember the names of anyone I’ve killed, to be honest.”

“Don’t worry, you will soon,” the monster said before suddenly disappearing.

Oh no, this is bad! I need to kill these casters in order to get out. If they disappear, I’m screwed! Dammit! Where will he come from? It’s only natural I can still get hit from angles I don’t expect.

I looked around, wary of my surroundings, but I couldn’t sense anything. If this concealment was the work of magic, it was perfect. I had no way of seeing through it.

“For now, FULL-POWER MIMIC PINBALL!”

If I can’t see them, I’ll just go on a rampage! Maybe I’ll hit someone by chance.

With that thought, I started bouncing off the trees.

Thkthkthkthkthkthk! Snap! Trrrk! Crash!

Unable to bear the force of my impacts, the trees started to break.

Oh well, that’s not a terrible outcome. It might hinder the enemy.

“Gyaarghh!” Finally, I managed to feel a hit.

As I thought, they were just invisible. I could still hurt them. The dead robed man was revealed, looking like a used rag.

Great! I can just keep this up!

THUDTHUDTHUDTHUDTHUDTHUD!

Just when I thought I’d seen the light at the end of the tunnel, I heard something so loud, it managed to shake the earth.

Huh? What’s that?

I started looking for the source of the sound while ricocheting from tree to tree. The answer soon became evident—it was coming from above me. From out of nowhere, something had appeared in the sky.

“Ah!” I cried.

I was reminded of that idiot mage who’d tried to use a meteor in an underground dungeon.

Chapter 16: Mimic vs. Meteor

Meteor? Just as the thought crossed my mind, I was hit by the impact—there was no time to dodge.

BOOoooOOOMM!

I'd just barely managed to raise my arms in time to defend against the damage. Could I get a round of applause, please?

Anyway... What was I thinking, stopping a gigantic rock plummeting out of the sky straight on?!

A bad move was just that—a bad move. I should've run like hell the moment I saw it. There wasn't any other way to save myself.

Both my arms had been instantly vaporized. Yep, trying to stop the attack with my hands had proven to be utterly pointless!

Well, I guess that was obvious—that meteor and its insane amount of heat had been no joke! It hadn't even given me time to form impressions, like how heavy it was or whatever. I'd simply been buffeted by the tremendous force of the attack.

At the moment, all of that force was being supported by my wooden body and my legs, and I was just barely maintaining equilibrium.

"GWWOOAARRGGHH!"

Somehow, I'd been able to take the initial blow. My body hadn't instantly collapsed, thanks to the Crimson Rose.

But I knew it was all downhill from here. My body was already in rough shape—singed and nearly squashed—and I knew I couldn't take much more.

Oh, and the land around me had evaporated. I could tell because I was sinking into the ground.

Dammit, what the hell?! How in the demon lord's name am I supposed to get out of this?!

I would only last another handful of seconds. I was about to become a pancake under the meteor—it was a future that I could see all too clearly.

My vision grew dim as I was weighed down by a feeling of hopelessness—it was a lot like slowly sinking into magma, or being squashed by a cave-in deep inside a dungeon.

Dammit, I don't need any similes! It's pointless to resist this! Why not just accept my fate? It'd be much better to just let go and get flattened all at once—at least then I wouldn't have to suffer. I'm just showing the world how much of a fool I am by trying to fight against this hopeless amount of weight! GRRRAHHH! DAMMIT! NO! DON'T FUCK WITH ME! I'LL NEVER GIVE UP! I'll struggle until my last breath!

Dingaling!

As soon as I thought that, I heard a chime.

[You have gained the skill: **Automatic Recovery +1**]

Those words popped up in front of me.

Huh? Oh yeah, I didn't actually have that skill. Apparently Crimson Rose has the ability to heal me, but I guess I can also do it myself now?

Suddenly, my situation wasn't looking quite so hopeless.

The weight and pressure of the meteor hadn't changed, but now that I was able to recover a little faster, my dents and burns were weighing slightly less on my mind.

Dingaling! Dingaling!

[You have gained the skill: **Automatic Recovery +2**]

[You have gained the skill: **Automatic Recovery +3**]

I see. So this is what they mean when they say it's easier to awaken skills in a tight spot.

Bwoop!

My new healing skills meant I recovered faster than the damage I received from the meteor, so my arms grew back. It was kind of like pouring water onto a molten stone, but it was better than nothing.

It felt like the tides had started to turn.

Yeah. I'm alive right now, and that's enough to break out of this deadlock somehow... It's gotta be! I'm pretty sure that the meteor had the most power at the moment of impact, so whatever's left is just residual momentum. We're in a war of attrition.

"T-Take...*THIS!*" As a signal of my counterattack, I raised my right arm.

Ftsss!

My arm burned away again. *Huh, they really are my weakest part. But that's fine—I can just grow them again!*

"Raaagggghhh!"

Right, left! Right, left! I continued to swing my arms upwards, heedless of what was happening to them. Of course, they vaporized as soon as they hit the meteor. Nothing was happening.

Damn! No good, huh? Do I really have no hands to play?!

Thunk!

The ground had melted all the way to bedrock, and I'd continued to sink into it all the while.

Hm, in that case...!

I kicked off the bedrock. The force from that traveled through my body and into the meteor.

Kathwoom! Skrsshh!

Splrt!

Nosebleed! I'm gonna get a nosebleed... Not that I have a nose!

But that wasn't important, because I'd managed to strike a blow against the

meteor!

Still, this plan wouldn't work in the long run. That one blow had almost killed me. I'd taken stupid amounts of damage, and my automatic recovery couldn't keep up. If I waited to heal, though, I'd be flattened.

Plus, it didn't seem like my Automatic Recovery skill would be leveling up anymore.

Ahhh, dammit! Just when it seemed like things would work out! Suddenly, I came to a realization. Hey, I have items! But I can't take them out like this... No, wait—my frame's warped! There's a gap now!

I retrieved a bottle and held it in my hand.

"Heal potion!"

I splashed its contents all over my body.

Good, I'm healed! Kick the ground! Potion! Kick the ground! Potion!

Skrssh, skrrssh, skrrssh!

I couldn't tell if that was the sound of my body getting crushed, or the sound of the meteor warping.

Aggh, I don't care! This is my only way out! It's a battle of guts, got it?!

Thumpthumpthumpthumpthump!

I stamped on the ground as much as I could, trying to force the recoil onto the meteor.

Dingaling! Dingaling!

[You have gained the skill: **Stomp**]

[You have gained the skill: **Septuple Shooting Stars**]

My tactics had gained me new moves, but I didn't feel like using them at this point. Right now, I was focused on doing one thing—headbutting.

Yep, the treasure chest was my body, but it was also basically my head, right?

I kicked off the ground and used the force to headbutt the meteor. Then, I repeated that over and over like an idiot.

“DADADADADADADADADA!”

Then, after who knows how many repetitions, there was a sound.

Crack!

That seemed to have triggered a reaction, as everything else came all at once. Fractures ran down the meteor, which all instantly widened into fissures.

KerTHOOOM!

And then, it shattered.

Uhhh...did I do it? I did it?!

The pressure above me disappeared, and it felt like my hips would give out. I wasn't in a situation where I could relax, though—my surroundings looked like a postcard from hell. The surrounding forest had been charred to a crisp, and the ground had turned to magma. Even the air around me was burning.

Damn, I can't believe I survived! Ugh, the ground is so gloopy! I've sunk in pretty deep... Anyway, I need to climb out. I can't just stay here forever.

I slowly climbed my way out of the melted crater.

Man, that really hurt! I was recovering thanks to my skills and equipment, but I didn't feel one hundred percent yet. *Oh yeah, what about the monster barrier? I think they would've taken it down before Meteor was cast, right?*

Garellia had told me that casters needed to be inside the walls to maintain it, but I doubted that they could've survived that giant hunk of rock. I figured they must've undone the barrier and left once the Meteor had been cast.

I finally managed to get out of the crater.

Yeeep, I can't tell if the enemies or the barrier are still here at all!

I figured that I'd run into a wall soon enough once I started moving, so I did. That was when a voice called out to me.

“Did you really think this is over?”

“What?”

I looked around, but couldn't find anyone. I knew that voice, though—it was Garellia.

“Norton was killed. I figured you might have survived.”

“Uhh...can you just stop being a sore loser and—”

“Meteor Shower!”

Those words sent a shiver down my spine, and I immediately looked up. A clear blue sky stretched over me, but points of light suddenly started to dot it all over. The whole thing gave me chills.

Welp. I'm dead. How the hell am I supposed to survive that?!

Chapter 17: Side Story *Garellia the Polar Sky*

Although the Meteor had been meant to be more of a measuring stick, Garellia, truth be told, had expected the fight to end then and there. After all, there was no way for any living thing to survive such a strike, and it was nearly impossible to evade.

The Meteor was actually a summoning spell. It was basically impossible to pinpoint the exact moment when the summoning would be activated, and as soon as it appeared in the stratosphere, it would start hurtling down at a speed faster than the eye could track.

In other words, once the spell activated, that was the end. It would instantly kill the target almost every time.

However, the mimic had survived. It hadn't even dodged. Instead, it had opted to take the even more impossible route—outlast the rock.

Even then, Garellia had prepared for the impossible. He had prepared to cast the most secret of spells taught at his school: the Meteor Shower.

First, Garellia cast Meteor. Then, he immediately prepared to cast Meteor Shower. If the Meteor ended things, he could just cancel the casting, and the only loss would be some wasted magic.

"Okay, it's going to be harder to control the impact when it comes to Meteor Shower."

The monster-trapping barrier had already been released. Now, Garellia was controlling a barrier meant to stop the meteors from having undue impact on the world at large.

Garellia's students all canceled their Anti-detection spells and poured all their power into maintaining the barrier.

THOOMTHOOMTHOOMTHOOMTHOOM!

From the other side of the enclosure, an explosive cacophony—sounds of the

forest and ground beneath it being blasted into nothingness—reached their ears. Countless meteors rained down, filling the area with a blinding flash.

The heat and shock waves that were generated as a result were only barely being contained within the barrier. It also absorbed the swirling waves of force and overpressure inside. The fiery skill was the pinnacle of magic, and the enclosure limited the area of the meteor's deadly influence.

Finally, the interior started to become clear. Everything inside the barrier had disappeared, pulverized by the force of the impacts, then burned away by the great heat. There was literally nothing left, only flatness.

"Master Garellia, maintaining the barrier any longer will be...difficult." Garellia's students all gathered at his side.

There were supposed to be fifty of them, but only a little over half of them were still here. Several had been killed by the mimic, while the rest had most likely fallen during the ritual to cast the Meteor Shower.

No one would expect that so much firepower and sacrifice would be necessary to bring down a single mimic, but it had been necessary for Garellia. In order to solve the problem and maintain his pride as the leader of the greatest association of magic, he needed to hit the monster with everything he had.

"Almost all the aftereffects have been absorbed. Release the barrier."

The barrier dissipated. As soon as it did, a wave of hot wind rushed past. Fortunately, it was no longer strong enough to be life-threatening.

"I'll leave the cleanup to you all."

He had caused unrecoverable destruction in the dungeon, even if it was only a small area. Since Garellia had unleashed a wide-ranged annihilation spell so close to town, there would no doubt be voices of complaint coming at him from all sides. However, dealing with such things was not his job—he only had to plumb the depths of magic.

He turned around, his mind already filled with considerations on the applications of Meteor Shower in a real battle. At that moment, he heard a voice from behind him.

“Explosive Legs! Explosive Legs! Explosive Legs!”

Despite rational thought telling him it was impossible, Garellia recognized it as the mimic's. He turned around just in time to reflexively catch the flying body of one of his students.

KaBOOM!

The student exploded in Garellia's arms, but the teacher himself was unhurt. He was not so soft as to be damaged by the attack's aftermath. Unfortunately, the shock waves left in their wake conferred the property onto him and caused another chain of blasts. Even then, he withstood the damage. Garellia, who had taken in the bodies of several monsters, boasted almost unparalleled toughness.

The same couldn't be said of his students, who had all been reduced to a sorry state. They'd all blown up into fleshy chunks and splatters of blood, dyeing their surroundings crimson.

“Aggh, damn! I really thought I'd die there! You totally went ham, you bastard! Well, you know what they say...now it's my turn!”

The mimic stood inside the pool of blood, essentially unscathed.

Chapter 18: Mimic vs. Garellia the Polar Sky

“You...how...?”

Oh wow. He’s actually surprised. I couldn’t exactly read his features, given how beastly he looked, but I could tell by his general air.

“I had myself summoned.”

“What?!”

Anyone would realize it wasn’t much of a trick once I’d revealed it. I’d simply had Suama go back to town and get Dolhoi to summon me. Yep, I’d just made use of the fact that I’d forged a minute-long summoning pact with Dolhoi earlier!

She hadn’t made it in time for the first Meteor, just as I’d expected, but she *had* managed to get me out just before the Meteor Shower activated.

So I’d basically been saved by a bunch of piled-up coincidences. Suama had come up with the idea, made it back to town, and convinced Dolhoi to help. All of that had managed to happen before I was hit by the Meteor Shower. On top of that, the Meteor Shower had run its course during the time I was gone.

If even one of those things hadn’t gone perfectly, I would’ve disappeared without a trace.

“You must be an idiot, just showing yourself like that.”

Whoa, he’s exasperated for some reason. I get it, though—there was no reason for me to go out of my way to show myself.

He’d assumed that I’d died in the Meteor Shower, so I could’ve just escaped after I returned to the barrier unscathed. I knew that *would’ve* been the smart choice, but...it’d be utterly unthinkable to run away with my tail between my legs after all that! At this point, it wasn’t a question of reason—I had to get payback! I had to listen to that monstrous part of me, that instinct that demanded I kill him dead!

“I am Garellia the Polar Sky. Do you really think the likes of *you* could oppose *me*?”

“I dunno, I guess it might work out unexpectedly? I mean, you’re a mage, right? Can *you* really match up to *me*, who’s specialized in close combat?”

Sure, he had his powerful Meteor and Meteor Shower spells, but there was no way he could easily cast them over and over.

Also, if he could’ve beaten me with other spells, he would’ve done that first...right?

“I’m certain I’m mistaken, but did you think that I was only able to use Meteor spells? That was just a decision on my part to honor Norton.” Garellia raised his furry right hand. That motion was the signal for multiple fireballs, each one around two meters in diameter, to spawn.

Oops, this feels dangerous!

“Not to mention that your explosions had no effect on me. I didn’t even need to take any special defensive measures.”

“Well, look. We won’t know until we try, will we?”

That line seemed to be his signal to go, as Garellia signaled for the fireballs to launch.

My experience up until now was that magic was too fast to dodge. However...

“Septuple Shooting Stars!”

I had the skills I’d just learned!

The skill I’d just used was normally one that allowed me to move between enemies at high speeds and attack up to seven enemies at once. Since there was only one target in this case, though, it turned into a seven-hit combo!

I stepped in with godlike speed. Before the fireballs even had a chance to accelerate, I passed under them and managed to close in on Garellia.

Explosive Legs!

I ran past while attacking him. Meanwhile, the fireballs flew off in random directions. Then, with the momentum I still had from the skill, I made a U-turn!

I ran circles around Garellia, kicking his back, his sides, and more besides. I unleashed a barrage of Explosive Legs attacks.

Normally, Explosive Legs was only one attack. However, if I combined it with Septuple Shooting Stars, all the attacks made while the skill was active would be converted into Explosive Legs. In other words, I got seven Explosive Legs for the price of one!

“Take that! Septuple-Starred Explosive Legs!”

After the last hit, I retreated.

He’s managed to withstand a single explosion, but how about seven of them at once?

A beat later...

BOOBOOBOOBOOBOOBOOM!

The sounds came from inside Garellia’s body. At the same time, his body began to warp terribly. He was putting all his effort into somehow containing the explosions happening within him.

KABOOOOOM!

Finally, Garellia exploded in grand fashion.

Ohhh, thank goodness...

Naturally, I was at my limit. I’d run out of potions, and I was nearly out of the souls I needed to automatically recover.

Oh, that’s right. He might also recover. I should find the core.

I looked around for his head and found it stuck in a nearby tree by his horns.

There it is!

“You damned—”

Whoa! He’s still alive!

However, it seemed like he was on his last legs. I couldn’t imagine him fully recovering from his current condition.

“Too bad for you! Oh man, I was so lucky I managed to acquire skills while I

was getting hit by that meteor! If it wasn't for that, I might've lost!"

"Damn you, you box of calamity... I shouldn't have given you even the slightest chance to gain battle experience... Feeling you out was such foolishness..."

With that, Garellia fell silent.

Yeaah, I won! Woohooo! Anyway, what now? There shouldn't be any more enemies at the moment. Oh well, I should just go back to town and meet up with Suama.

"W-Will you really make another contract with me?" Dolhoi asked, acting extremely subservient.

We were currently in the parlor of Dolhoi's residence. Suama and I sat next to each other on the sofa, while Dolhoi sat across from us.

"Yeah. I was the one who made you waste the one you had, after all. Of course I'd compensate you for that. Now you'll be able to summon me twice, for a duration of five minutes each."

"Oohh! Thank you so much!"

Ah, he's actually happy. I wonder if the fact that he doesn't seem to mind that he's negotiating with an enemy of humanity is because he's a monster tamer?

"My word... Still, to become level 150 in such a short time...just what kind of great trial did you go through?"

"Trial, huh? You mean something like shrugging off a Meteor?"

"Right..."

Oops, looks like he thought I made a bad joke. That's a little irritating. But...level 150, huh? It feels about right. I was fighting Garellia and his students, after all, but I probably would've gotten even more if I'd been wearing my soul collecting rings. Kinda feels like a missed opportunity...

"I'm so glad you're safe, Harumi!"

"I was saved thanks to your cunning this time, Suama!"

I mean, I'd totally forgotten about the summoning thing myself!

In fact, even if I *had* remembered, I hadn't been in a position to relay that to Suama. In the end, everything had been up to her.

"Oh no, it was nothing, really. I just kinda thought that we could summon you out of the barrier, even if you couldn't get out yourself."

"You didn't think that it would be meaningless since I'd have to return in a minute?"

"Well, yes... But since the energy for both summoning and returning need to be supplied by Dolhoi, I thought that if we made him run out of energy during that minute, we could prevent you from returning."

Wow, this girl's kinda scary! Even Dolhoi's taken aback!

"Anyway, it's about time for us to leave. I'm pretty sure you know the rule by now?"

"Yes. I must keep you a secret."

Apparently the story he was planning to go with was that a girl came to ask him about monster taming, so he taught her.

We exited the mansion and left town. There was no real trouble, we were able to get out easily. There was a little bit of a fuss going on because they knew something had happened in the forest, but it seemed no one had discovered that we'd been involved in that yet.

"Well...those guys were after me, so maybe news of a dangerous walking mimic has started to go around..."

I'm the only one that fits that description, so I'd be totally exposed if that's the case.

"Where will you be going from here, Harumi?"

"Uhhh, well...the plan was to head for the Forest of Darkness to gather information, but... Yeah. What should we do now?"

It seemed like walking around nonchalantly wouldn't be very possible from here on out.

I suppose it's about time to get a more substantial disguise.

“Umm...what about using a wheelchair? You can transform to your human upper half, and we can hide your lower half. I don't think you'd be discovered easily that way.”

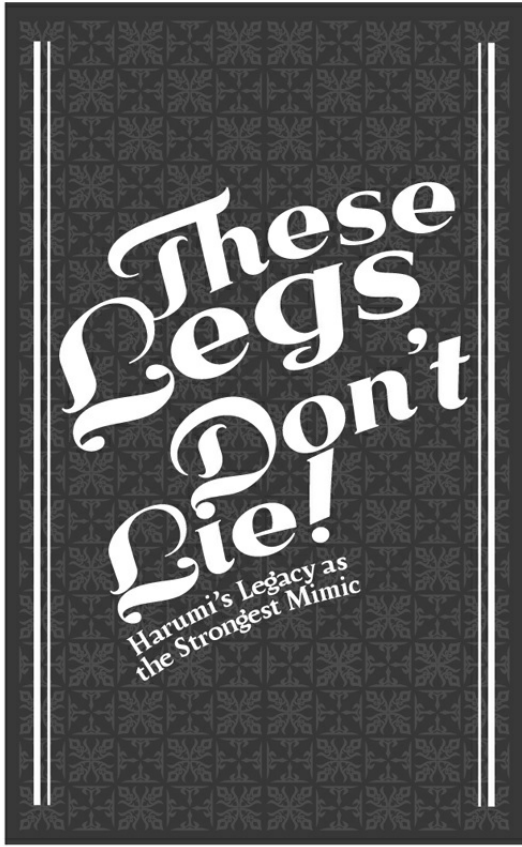
“Hrm, I guess that could work. If I were to sit in a wheelchair and hide my lower half, there wouldn't be many people who'd try to take a peek. We might also want to make some fake legs to show off while we're at it.”

Getting our hands on a wheelchair seemed like it would take a lot of work, though. In the end, my final goal was the EliMon Center located on the northern continent.

“Let's just head north for now.”

Oh well, it'll all work out somehow! And it's not like I'll be able to solve all my problems by stopping to rack my brains right now. So...

We decided to head north.



Extra *Short Story*



Marinnie's Dungeon Management

(Two days before the start of Season 389...)

"All right then, I'm counting on you for the preparations for season 389!"

"Okaaayyy!"

After receiving her orders from Lord Aldora, the boss of the dungeon, Marinnie headed over to the monster laboratory.

Marinnie was the mid-boss stationed on the tenth floor, and she was entrusted with management of the first through tenth floors.

It was the off-season. Surviving monsters had all returned to the maintenance area and were enjoying their time off. For mid-bosses like her, however, their jobs had just begun.

Marinnie left the castle and headed to the laboratory while thinking of the future. Dungeon management consisted almost entirely of deciding the initial placement of monsters. Once the season started, it would be impossible to micromanage and make changes.

Naturally, that meant learning the natures, abilities, and numbers of the monsters available to her would be important. First, she needed to get a total survivor count from last season. If there were any that had leveled up, she would need to rerank them.

Placements on each floor were mostly predetermined, though, which meant Marinnie needed to create new monsters to make up for any openings.

After she reached the laboratory, Marinnie entered the room where the monster maker was located. It was a black ball situated in the middle of the room, and it was where the newborns would pop out.

Spirits were needed to produce new monsters. They were a resource available to dungeon management, so it was important to balance their use. Thus, Marinnie's budget for the season had already been decided by Lord

Aldora.

Sure, injecting a large amount of the ethereal material would lead to a powerful monster, but would it be able to collect enough spirits for them to make a profit? That was always the question.

“It’d be so simple if the amount of spirits used really did produce a proportionately strong monster, though...” Marinnie spoke to the monster maker. After all, it was also a species of monster.

“I’ve been doing this a long time, and that’s the only part I can’t do anything about,” the monster maker replied, almost sounding like it was complaining.

It was possible to control the process to an extent by managing the attributes of the used spirits and their mixture, but there were no guarantees. It was still largely up to luck. The amount left to chance was so great that there were those that resorted to teasingly calling the monster maker the monster gacha instead.

“Oh well, let’s just do this like normal. For now, I’d like about three in the level 50 range, so aim for that, please.”

Marinnie started with the high-ranking spirits on her list. There were many ways to use them, but the most fundamental way was to repurpose a single spirit as it was without mixing or adding others. Since they were part of what made the core of adventurers and monsters, the strength of the spirit in life would translate directly to the rank of the creation. In other words, using a high-ranking spirit would make it very likely to produce a strong monster.

The monster maker reached out with black tendrils, grabbed a spirit flask off of a nearby shelf, opened it, and absorbed the spirit.

The monster maker started shaking vehemently. After a while, it spat out a lion with six legs.

Incidentally, the size of the monster maker limited the species of creatures created. The one in this room was five meters in diameter, which meant it could only create monsters smaller than that.

“Oooh, a massive leo! That’s a good sign.”

The monster maker continued to intake spirits and spit out monsters of

various ranks. After it had produced the number of creatures that Marinnie had specified, it stopped.

“What next?”

“Well, it wouldn’t be good to be wasteful, so let’s leave it here for today,” Marinnie said.

She’d gotten the monsters she needed for her floors, so she didn’t need any more of them.

At least...that’s what would’ve *normally* happened, which would’ve meant that a certain monster that would go on to shake the world wouldn’t have been born.

(One day before the start of season 389...)

“A double item drop promotion?”

Marinnie was surprised at the sudden order she’d been given after being summoned to Lord Aldora’s room.

“Exactly. Haven’t the number of delving adventurers gone down recently? It made me think—we should try doing something flashy to remedy that!”

“Uhhh, but the season is starting in just a few more hours...” Marinnie looked up to and respected Lord Aldora, but even she couldn’t help but make that remark.

Such an order with so little time before the start of the season was a big burden.

In essence, Lord Aldora’s request meant increasing the number of treasure chests. That also meant that Marinnie would need to prepare more items and think about their placements.

Still, there was an even bigger problem.

“We don’t have enough treasure chests for that. Isn’t double too much? Couldn’t we just settle for a twenty percent increase?”

Chests were sturdy, so they were normally recycled. There weren’t many

spares because of that, and there wasn't enough time to order new ones now—they wouldn't be done in time.

“No! Twenty percent wouldn't be big enough to be obvious! Just throwing the items on the floor wouldn't look good, though... Oh, I know! How about using mimics? We can just use spirits to make more monsters. Why not just make some weak ones?”

Mimics were both monsters and a sort of trap. That meant that they needed a decent amount of strength, so that adventurers who made a mistake in judgment would face the consequences.

“Wait, that's really okay with you?!” Marinnie was surprised—the thought of making monsters *weaker* had never occurred to her.

“It's fine, it's fine!”

“It's possible, but...all right. We'll go with that.”

Marinnie had a hard time rejecting Lord Aldora's ideas. Still, she was short on time, so she had no choice but to go to the laboratory right away.

“As weak as possible, using the inorganic recipe?”

“That's right. Basically, we need weak mimics.”

“I see...” The monster maker was puzzled—it had never thought such a thing would be expected of it.

However, work was work, so it got moving. It used the leftover scraps of spirits that would not be of any use by themselves, mixing them together randomly with the intent of making inorganic monsters.

The first run produced the following monsters: a golem, a mimic, a gargoyle, a slime, a mimic, an iron ant, a metal monkey, a mimic, a golem, and a bronze crab.

Mimics were coming out as planned with a decently high probability. Since they were all low-leveled, though, they wouldn't count for much no matter how many there were.

The monster maker had complicated feelings over this latest run. “I kind of feel sorry for them, being born just to hold loot.”

“I, um... Well, I can’t do anything about that.”

“What’s even sadder are these non-mimic monsters...”

Those that weren’t mimics were even less useful—essentially, they were just weak cannon fodder. At best, they could serve on the first underground floor, but there weren’t any vacancies left. Instead, they were disposed of before they ever woke up, and their spirits were returned to storage.

Once there were enough mimics, Marinnie called her subordinate arachnae.

“Okaaay! We don’t have much time, so let’s work fast! I need these mimics packed with items!”

“Got it, sis!”

The juvenile arachnae took the items that had been prepared beforehand and started working.

“Big sis, there aren’t enough items!”

“Huh? Really?” Marinnie responded. *We can’t just have these mimics carrying nothing*, she thought, so she continued, “Then just put in whatever, I don’t care.”

She and the other arachnae had managed to prepare the full list of rare items Lord Aldora had requested thanks to her spending spree, but it seemed there were too many mimics.

“Hmmm, what should we do...?”

“Ah, how about this? I just picked it up the other day!”

“What? What is it?”

“Dunno! An adventurer dropped it!”

“Should we really put it in?”

“Sure! I don’t need it; it’s not very cute.”

“Then this one can be a booby prize!”

“Yeah! A booby prize!”

The juvenile arachnae were having a lot of fun chatting as they stuffed a mimic with 10G in copper coins.

“Oh well, I guess it’s fine to have at least one with nothing worthwhile in it. That one’ll go on the first floor.”

With their items stored, the mimics were sent to their respective waiting rooms on their floors.

“Okay then...”

Marinnie had finally finished with one hour left until the start of the season.

From here on out, the monsters would have to be carried to their assigned positions, and she would have to update the placement sheet published to the adventurers.

It was still up in the air whether or not they would make it in time for the start of the season.

(Season 389, the first day...)

“Heya, it’s Marinnie! I’ll be doing this announcement in Lord Aldora’s stead: Season 389 starts *nooowww*! Let’s all work hard to murder all those adventurers!” After finishing the start-of-season announcement, Marinnie finally breathed a sigh of relief. She was currently in the mid-boss’s waiting room, located in the dungeon’s maintenance area. “I’m gonna be pretty free for a while...”

Almost all of a dungeon administrator’s job was in the initial planning phase of a season. There were some dungeons which allowed changes and micromanaging during the season, but that wasn’t the case for the Aldora Labyrinth.

Though the labyrinth had tested out different formats in the past, management had learned that almost everything depended on the initial placement of monsters. That was why they settled on giving the monsters their freedom during the season.

As Marinnie spaced out, a group of small arachnae gathered around her.
“Hey, big sis! If you’re free, play with us!”

Infants like them were born from monsters classified as pure-strains. The monster maker was great at easily producing disposable pawns, but that was it. The ruling class had always been populated by ancient clans of pure-strains.

“Only for a bit, okay?”

If an emergency popped up, Marinnie would probably have to handle it personally. The season had just started, though, and she couldn’t imagine anything very serious would happen right away.

Nothing special happened that first day...at least, from her point of view. The reality was that a simple monster that had been meant to be nothing more than a box to store junk in had obtained a certain item, and was now in the process of wreaking havoc.

Not that Marinnie had any way of knowing that.

(Season 389, the second day...)

“Oh nooo, I’ve been slaaaaiin...” Marinnie fell.

She was in the midst of her job as the mid-boss of the tenth floor. Of course, no administrator could afford to be killed off every single time—the adventurers had simply defeated a shadow which shared the arachne’s consciousness.

There were pros and cons to the method. Naturally, the shadow was weaker than the original, and it could only be created within the confines of the dungeon. It was simple to construct, though, and only needed souls to make. That meant there wasn’t much lost upon its death.

“The second day’s going well too,” Marinnie whispered to herself as her consciousness returned to the maintenance area.

“Big sis, there’s a summons from the council for you!” An infantile arachne came to share its news with her.

“What? *Now?*”

It was only a few hours until the close of the second day; it should've already been nighttime up at the surface.

Although Marinnie considered it a major hassle, she decided to heed the summons anyway. The relationship between adventurers and dungeons was one of give-and-take, so she couldn't afford to refuse them outright.

"Bring me my clothes."

Marinnie went around naked in the dungeon, but that would cause problems in a human town.

"Okaaay!" The small arachne left. A swarm of them came back with a set of clothing.

"So jealous... I want clothes too..."

"Clothes are just a major pain, though. They're so constricting."

Once she'd finished putting on her clothes—a dress with a wide back, reminiscent of a bustle, and rigid wiring to cover her spider half—Marinnie left through the dungeon's back door.



With the way the clothes were designed, Marinnie's monstrous half was covered. Despite that, her beauty tended to gather attention anyway.

(Season 389, the third day...)

By the time Marinnie had left the council and stepped outside, the date had changed. It seemed to her that they were picking a fight, so she'd reflexively responded in kind, but she felt a sense of disbelief over their claims.

Had a mutation really appeared on the first floor that was so strong it made dungeon diving impossible? It seemed unlikely. They'd gone through the trouble of calling Marinnie, though, so something probably *had* happened.

Marinnie decided to return through the front entrance. Whatever was going on a rampage on the first floor had taken up camp right inside the square and was massacring every adventurer that dared enter.

Marinnie walked through the wilderness on the outskirts of town and came upon an old, decrepit-looking stone building. It looked like a small roadside shrine, but it was the official entrance into the Aldora Labyrinth.

There was a booth placed to the side of the building, watching over the entrance, with a human stationed there at all times. They had put up a sign in front of the entrance that forbade entry—probably in response to the crisis they were facing.

Marinnie was a monster, though, so she proceeded inside; she didn't need to heed human rules.

Once she was free from prying human eyes inside the dungeon, Marinnie stripped off her dress. She would never get used to its constricting feeling.

As she walked down the stairs, she heard a voice coming from the square.

"Oh, but if an adventurer dies and comes back as a ghost, do they count as monsters?"

"Adventurers who die here have everything used up—from their body to their souls—so I don't think there's anything left to become ghosts."

The owner of that voice is probably the monster in question, Marinnie thought

as she reached the first-floor square.

Once she reached the source, she was taken utterly by surprise—she was face-to-face with a strange mimic with limbs, something she'd never seen before.

“Oh, uhh... Good eve—”

“Whoa, what's this? A mimic? Am I right? But why does it have legs? And why is it here?” *We made them weak, but maybe something went wrong with the mass production?*

Marinnie used her Appraisal skill. It was a level 12 mimic, and its name was Harumi.

The fact that it had managed to raise its level that high within the dungeon, where it was notoriously difficult to level, told Marinnie that it had sent quite the number of adventurers to their graves.

However, what she couldn't tell was *how* the mimic had managed to do that. Even if it *was* a sudden mutation, it should've been impossible for the monster to completely annihilate the first floor adventurers.

Wait, it's wearing a strange pair of high heels. Maybe that's the cause?

Marinnie appraised the high heels.

[Appraisal attempt...failed!]

It must be quite rare. Marinnie tried again...and froze.

[Error: You are not allowed a second try.]

The anger radiating from the heels—so strong it was almost like a curse—overpowered Marinnie.

I've heard that some legendary items have a will. Could this really be one of those?

Somehow, she managed to come to her senses. If she hadn't, it would've looked like she was cowed by a mimic that had been made through her own orders, and there was no way her pride would allow for that.

Still, it seemed that Harumi had noticed Marinnie's hesitation. Fortunately, she'd only interpreted it as surprise over her strange form.

"Ahh, sorry, sorry. You're Harumi, right? I'm Marinnie. D'you remember me?"

After hearing the mimic's story, Marinnie learned that she'd been attacked by adventurers and managed to gain this form somehow when she tried to save herself through her Mimicry skill. According to her, once that had happened, one of the adventurers betrayed the others to save her. Then, said adventurer had forced her to wear those strange high heels—the Crimson Rose.

The hell was he trying to accomplish?

The mimic's claimed sequence of events was confusing, but in Marinnie's opinion, it seemed that it really was the high heels that were enhancing Harumi's strength so much. She didn't know the specs of the shoes, but there was no doubt in her mind that it was a legendary—or even ancient legendary—item.

Harumi would probably be fine, no matter who came for her, as long as she had those shoes on.

Although, in all honesty, it would've been easy for Marinnie to kill Harumi. As an administrator, Marinnie was in possession of a command that would instantly kill the mimic. It was the best option to settle the entire incident peacefully.

But the whole thing didn't sit right with Marinnie. She hated doing things that struck her as unfair, and killing off a subordinate just because it was proving an inconvenience by trying to do its job was one of them.

That was why she decided to do everything in her power for the little mimic.

(Season 389, the fourth day...)

The council hadn't done anything yet, but Marinnie knew they would take

some sort of action during the season. She was pretty sure there wouldn't be a hero, but she could easily imagine them sending in a group of high-ranking adventurers.

In the end, though, nothing happened that day.

(Season 389, the fifth day...)

"Marinnie here! I'm here in Lord Aldora's place to declare that season 389 is over! Good work, everyone! Everyone who survived, please wait where you are; the dungeon keeper will be coming to get you!"

The season had come to an end, so Marinnie made the announcement.

She had a small idea of what had happened on the first floor based on the movement of souls. From the large amount of souls coming out from there, Marinnie could tell Harumi had managed to defeat all her challengers.

So in the end, Harumi had survived. Not only that, but she hadn't done so by running and hiding.

Adventurers had been forbidden from entering after the second day in the season, so Marinnie had expected the dungeon to end up in the red souls-wise. As it turned out, they actually ended up raking it in.

Lord Aldora came to visit Marinnie in her room. "Good evening! Check out all the souls we've got!"

"It's all thanks to Harumi—the mimic I told you about the other day. Looks like she made a killing."

"I see! Good, good... Hmm... But given her accomplishments, I get the feeling her reward's gonna have to be something incredible according to our rules..."

"Yeah, I think you're right... I never expected so many big names to show up, only to die."

"Right? I think we gotta recommend her to the EliMon Center!"

"EliMon? You mean the Elite Monster Center?! Isn't that kinda extra?"

Elite monsters were direct subordinates of the great demon lords. It was hard

to even be considered a candidate. Even if Harumi had her Crimson Rose, Marinnie didn't believe that the heels alone would be able to carry her through.

"Nope! She can do it! I believe in her!"

Ah, so it's the same old, same old...

Marinnie knew that Lord Aldora had already made up her mind, and nothing she said would change anything.

I feel kinda sorry for Harumi, but it's true that we can't afford to keep her here either...

By Marinnie's estimation, it was no longer possible to place Harumi anywhere in the dungeon. The only options were to coddle her and treat her like a pet, or end her. Both options seemed too cruel to Marinnie.

In the end, leaving the dungeon was probably the best choice after all.

Well, Harumi, just try your best, I guess!

In the end, Marinnie could only irresponsibly cheer Harumi on in her heart.

Interview with a Mimic

“Huh? What? We’ve started already?”

“Yes. We came here because we’ve planned an interview with you, Harumi! You’re the super major-league rookie who managed to earn a million points in her debut season!” a harpy exclaimed.

Yeah...this chick’s probably a harpy, right? She’s gotta be; she’s a bird-girl monster. Sorry if I’m wrong!

Anyway, why was I suddenly being interviewed?

Well, after I’d finished shopping and installing plug-ins, I was taking a break at a restaurant in the maintenance area. That was when the harpy had found me.

Apparently, she wanted to hear about my exploits. She told me I’d get paid for it, and I had time to kill anyway, so I decided to accept.

“But don’t you need, like, a notepad to take notes for an interview? You’re empty-handed.”

Well, I guess “empty-handed” was the wrong word here... I mean, she didn’t have any hands in the first place; her arms were wings.

Don’t tell me she’s just planning to memorize our whole convo?

“Don’t worry! I have a Sound Recorder plug-in.”

Oh yeeeah, that exists. I mean, I have it too. I thought it’d be useless, but look at me being wrong already!

“Let’s get started, okay? I’ve heard that you were stationed on the first underground floor. To be blunt, that means you’re supposed to be really weak, right? There’re rumors of you being a mutation, so what do you think about that, Harumi?”

“Mutation? I have no idea what that means, or whether that’s true or not, but I’m guessing I’m not?”

Hrm...it's true that I have limbs, so I get the feeling that I'm different from a normal mimic. Is that enough to be called a "mutation," though?

"Really now? Then how are you able to mow down adventurers by the dozens now?"

"Uhh, like...by kicking them and stuff?" I showed her a swiping kick that was fast enough it made an audible noise.

"This may sound rude, but it's hard for me to believe that was enough to earn you a million points..."

Ah, she's doubting me! She's totally looking at me like, "Did you really do all that? You aren't exaggerating?" Hrrmmm...what do I do? Should I just be honest? Just say, "I got a super powerful item from an adventurer that carried me the whole way!" I mean, that's basically the truth. But...I don't know what form of media this'll be published in. I'm sure it'll have readers though, right? I wonder how they'd feel with that answer. Would they be disappointed? I mean, adventurers are the enemy. Would they be okay with me answering, "I got help from the enemy"?

I mean, even someone like me could be a people—er, monster—pleaser, so to speak. That just meant I could work in the service industry.

"Ahh, uhh... Well, I kinda heard, like, a voice?"

"A...voice?"

"How should I put it? Like, it was something that echoed from the depths of hell, I guess? Imagine dialing up the bass to max and then some."

"I see. Interesting."

"And, you know, it said stuff... Like, 'Do you desire power?' and whatever."

"Oooh! So what did you do?"

"At that time, I was being chased around by adventurers, and I was still level 1. I was at the end of my rope, so of course I jumped on the offer. Anyone would, right? When I did, the voice answered, 'Then I will grant it to you!' It sounded kinda pompous."

"And then?"

“Well, like... I just felt power welling up from inside. I was wrapped in a golden aura. I could do all sorts of stuff, like letting out shock waves just by waving my hands that sent the adventurers in front of me flying, or kicks that could split adventurers in half. Oh, is that what you meant by mutation?”

Oh boy, she's nodding so hard it looks like her head'll fall off. Is she seriously buying all of this? Her eyes are totally sparkling with respect too...

“Could that voice have been the demon lord? I'm sure that's what it was! So that's why you were recommended for the EliMon Center, right?!”

“Huh? Well, I don't know about that... I'm not clear on all the details...” For some reason, I could only hedge and mumble.

Yeaah...oh well, whatever! It's not like the truth is all that interesting, anyway!

Afterword

Thank you all very much for buying this book.

I know this is sudden, but I am terrible at writing afterwords. They always cause me a lot of stress. However, here's a tip for authors—it's possible to use the space to introduce both the writer and their other series (at least in the first volume), so I'm going to use the space on that!

My Big Sister Lives in a Fantasy World

A completed series with 7 volumes, published by HJ Bunko. This is a modern-day story set in school. A boy with a delusional older sister has chuunibyou training pushed on him, and—as a result—he becomes the strongest entity of all! He ends up fighting murderers, vampires, zombies, witches, evil gods, and people who force him into mysterious games of death.

Daimaou ga Taosenai (The Demon Lord is Undefeatable!)

An isekai fantasy published by Earthstar Novels, with three volumes currently released. The main character is a beauty and also the strongest Demon Lord. As the title suggests, she is undefeatable.

My Instant Death Ability Is So Overpowered, No One in This Other World Stands a Chance Against Me! —AΩ—

Published by Earth Star Novels, with four volumes currently released and counting. It's exactly what it says on the tin. The main character's power is to instantly kill any target at will. That's all. No matter who it is, they will instantly die. Thus, it's a pretty laid-back isekai fantasy series.

Also, this series has been turned into a manga by Nanto Hanamaru-sensei, which is published in Comic Earthstar (<http://comic-earthstar.jp/>). I also recommend that, so please check it out!

Lastly, we have my fourth series—the one you are reading right now. In the world of this series, mimics like you’d see in some nationally renowned RPG series are the norm, but for some reason, a mimic with arms and legs is the main character.

As you might be able to tell by the reference to legs in the title, the motif here is something steeped in greed. The style is less dark fantasy and more of a...carefree(?) isekai monster story with RPG elements, though.

The RPG system here is a mishmash of all the games your dear author has played thus far, so those who like games might recognize some of my sources of inspiration.

Those who’ve read all the way through the book and are just now reading the afterword might be thinking, “And? Where’s the cute girl on the cover?” But...well, you know...it’s just a cover image! That’s how it’ll look if she ever manages to get her upper and lower halves at the same time. Not that it ever appears in the first volume!

Well, mimicry literally means to pretend to be something else. Mimics aren’t limited to just treasure chests, so I’ll just say that it’s possible for a mimic to pretend to be human!

Oh, I was going to do a “We need weirdo adventurers! Currently recruiting!” thing, but it looks like I’ve written enough. I guess it’s not needed. I haven’t actually prepared any application guidelines or requirements or anything, but any passionate eccentrics can look at the colophon and apply with the information there. Or you can look up my Twitter and send an application there!

And now that I’ve built up a good amount of padding, it’s time for acknowledgments and thanks:

To Yuunagi-sensei, who was in charge of the illustrations—thank you so much for taking on this responsibility. I can’t help but wonder if it’s really okay to have you draw stuff like strange mimics with limbs, but I’m all the more grateful that you’ve portrayed such a bizarre main character so cutely.

To my editor—thank you for taking this on in addition to *Instant Death Cheat*. I was also grateful that you listened to me when I came to you with such a

weird story.

The big number one on the cover might imply the will to do a second volume, but that actually depends on how this book fares in sales. To any of you who found this story interesting, I would be terribly happy if you would spread the word to your friends and over the internet.

Anyway, let's meet again in the next volume!

Fujitaka Tsuyoshi

“Ah...”

Gradually, the number of lights disappeared one by one. It was not long before the last one vanished, and the forest was again shrouded in its original darkness. Mit stared up at the traces of moonlight through the treetops. Angeline chuckled, grabbing their hands and standing.

“Now let’s go back.”

Not understanding a thing, Mit and Charlotte followed her lead. They had barely entered the woods and were now out once more. The moonlight was as bright as ever, lighting the plains in white.

Looking up at Angeline, Charlotte asked, “What were those lights, sis?”

“That, you see—that was spirit fire,” Angeline replied.

“Spirit fire?” Mit cocked his head curiously.

“Yes... Once upon a time, I was lost and alone in that forest.” Angeline’s eyes narrowed as she reminisced. “It was before the spring festival, you see. I thought I’d pick some glowgrass on my own, and that dad would praise me for it... But I got tired and fell asleep along the way, and before I knew it, night had fallen. It was dark and cold, and I was terrified.”

“What happened then?”

“I was too scared to move, and when I was mulling over what to do, those lights came to me... Their beauty let me forget my fear for a moment. And after that, dad came to save me. When I asked him later, he told me it must have been spirit fire. He said they came because I looked lonely.”

Mit blinked. He wondered about those flickering lights he had seen in the Ancient Forest—had they come because they were worried about him?

“Are spirits...kind...?”

“Yeah. They like kids, I hear. Though they do their share of mischief too... I’m sure they came all the way to the forest’s edge because they wanted you two to notice.”

Mit and Charlotte immediately found themselves looking back. In the depths

of the shadows, the green light let off one final burst before fading for good. It felt as though it was waving a hand. Their fears were gone now, and Mit was excitedly pulling Angeline ahead.

“Amazing. It was pretty.”

“It was. The forest isn’t as scary at night as I thought,” Charlotte said with a giggle. When she went to pick glowgrass, she had gone with a large party, and she hadn’t been given the time to feel scared. Even now that it was just the three of them, she felt more awestruck than afraid.

“There’s a folktale about spirit fire, you know. The tale of Lost Isolde... My dad knows it.”

“Really?”

“I want to hear it.”

The three returned in a hurry for a story. They didn’t head to the annex, instead opening the door to the main house. Belgrieve and Graham turned from their seats at the fireplace.

“Hmm? Bedtime already?”

“Dad, I want to hear about Lost Isolde!”

“Tell us!”

The kids raced to Belgrieve and sat on both sides. Belgrieve looked pleasantly surprised, tugging at his beard to bring back some memories.

“That story... All right, I don’t see why not. But first, brush your teeth and get ready to sleep.”

They quickly stood and went to get their pajamas.

Kasim, slouched in a chair and sipping distilled liquor, cackled. “The kids sure are lively.”

“Yeah... Ange, did something happen?”

“You could say that...” Angeline chuckled.

Graham closed his eyes, a slight smile on his face.

As they changed clothes, Charlotte softly whispered to Mit, “Honestly, I was a little scared when we entered the forest.”

“I...was too. But I really am fine now.”

“Hee hee, yes. I never knew it could be so warm in there.”

Strangely, it *had* felt warmer in the forest than on the plains. The canopy had protected them from the cold air blowing from above. Though they had been too nervous and fearful to realize it then, the memory seemed to be coming back now.

When they were changed and their teeth were brushed, they sat down beside Belgrieve. Belgrieve prepared some hot water and then slowly told a tale. It was a story of a girl who lost her way, and how she was led back to town by the light of spirit fire. That’s all there was to it; it was a simple tale, yet it was lovely for its simplicity.

The forest could be scary, but it could be warm too. *I’ll have another look at it*, thought Mit. The fears he had held on to for so long had seemingly been burned away.

There was a crackling sound. The log in the fireplace burst, sending specks of flame dancing through the air.



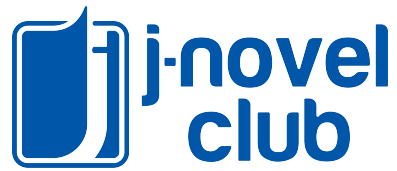
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These Legs Don't Lie!
Harumi's Legacy as the Strongest Mimic

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Illustrator Yuunagi





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These Legs Don't Lie! Harumi's Legacy as the Strongest Mimic: Volume 1

by Tsuyoshi Fujitaka

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